

— Yakov and Me —

Answering Jewish Objections To
The Christian Interpretation of Isaiah 53
... And Other Topics

by Lon Koenig

FOREWORD	3
CHAPTER 1 — THE BIG CONTROVERSY - THE SERVANT IN ISAIAH 52/53	6
COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF ISAIAH 52:13-53:12	6
THE SERVANT PASSAGE	7
THE SERVANT – AN INDIVIDUAL OR ISRAEL?	8
A VERSE-BY-VERSE EXAMINATION OF ISAIAH 52:13-53:12	9
WHY THE JEWISH EXPLANATION OF JEWISH SUFFERING IS UNACCEPTABLE	47
CHAPTER 2 — YAKOV’S OTHER “BIG TICKET ITEMS”	56
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION OF MESSIANIC PASSAGES	56
ISAIAH 7:14: “THE YOUNG WOMAN IS WITH CHILD... SHE SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL”	62
DANIEL 9:24-27 AND THE “70 WEEKS”	67
G-D OR YHWH? THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD’S PERSONAL NAME – יהוה	94
GOD’S NAME AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM	103
CHAPTER 3 — YAKOV’S OBJECTIONS: JESUS, CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM	114
“JESUS DID NOT FULFILL JEWISH MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS”	115
“JESUS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANTISEMITISM AND JEWISH PERSECUTION”	136
“JESUS’ CONDEMNATION OF THE PHARISEES WAS OVER THE TOP”	137
“JESUS LOST FAITH BEFORE HE DIED”	139
“JUST BECAUSE JESUS BELIEVED HE WAS THE MESSIAH DOESN’T MEAN HE WAS”	140
“‘FULFILL WHAT WAS PROPHESED’ WHEN IT ISN’T A PROPHECY?”	140
“VICARIOUS SACRIFICE DOES NOT EXIST IN THE TANAKH”	141
“THERE IS NO SACRIFICE FOR INTENTIONAL SIN IN THE LAW”	141
“CHRISTIANS TAMPERED WITH THE SEPTUAGINT TO FAVOR THEIR DOCTRINES”	145
“REFERENCES TO ISAIAH 52/53 WERE ADDED TO THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES MUCH LATER”	146
“STATISTICALLY, EVEN YOU COULD BE MESSIAH”	149
YAKOV AND ME — EPILOGUE	150
ADDENDUMS	155
1. 1800 YEARS OF JEWISH INTERPRETATION IDENTIFYING THE SERVANT AS AN INDIVIDUAL	155
2. AN ARTICLE IN DEFENSE OF THE JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF ISAIAH 52/53	156
3. ANALYSIS OF THE ARTICLE: <i>ISAIAH 53 – THE SUFFERING SERVANT</i>	163
4. THE CONTRASTING CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL AND THE SERVANT	192
5. A COMPARISON OF THREE OF THE SERVANT SONGS	195
6. ISAIAH 52:1-12: A RESTORATION PROPHECY LIKE OTHERS – WHY IT MATTERS	201
7. ISAIAH CHAPTER 52:1-12 COMPARED WITH OTHER RESTORATION PROPHECIES	202
8. A COMPARISON OF RESTORATION PROPHECIES IN ISAIAH CHAPTERS 40-51	207
9. THE MYTH OF THE TEN LOST TRIBES	210
10. REFERENCES TO EGYPT AND BABYLON LINK MOSES AND THE SERVANT	211

FOREWORD

This book and its strange title: Like so many things in life, this book just sort of happened. I had no plans to write about Isaiah 53 or any subject. First of all, I'm old, 79 years old, a respectable accumulation of summers and winters, and too old to be starting major projects that, potentially, could last longer than I do. But as things might happen, toward the end of 2023, Ronnie, a Christian like me, requested that I help him answer some questions of an acquaintance. Yakov (not his real name) was asking challenging questions from a Jewish perspective regarding Ronnie's belief in Jesus. Ronnie had never had much contact with Jews, let alone dealing with Jewish objections to Christian points of view, so he contacted me.

Why Me? ... I am Jewish, raised in a secular Jewish family, and I became a Christian, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, when I was 19 years old. My wife and I were missionaries for 33 years in Turkey, Spain, and Israel (13 years), until returning to the US in 2002. Presently we live in Colorado and associate with a Spanish congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. I also speak Hebrew, which is another reason Ronnie asked me to join him.

Yakov is middle aged, a retired CEO and scientist with sufficient resources permitting him to dedicate nearly all his time and energy to the study of the Tanakh (the Hebrew name for the first 39 books of the Bible, the Old Testament). I say, "*nearly* all his time," because he runs a charity aside from other charitable work. Yakov is sincerely religious, he writes "G-d," as a sign of respect and reverence (a practice of many Jews), keeps sabbath, and prays daily at regular intervals. He is intelligent, good-hearted and can be a little prickly, sometimes quite. He had lots of questions, some of them were new even to me. He set the agenda for our discussions in our first meeting on Zoom:

Me: It was a pleasure to meet you. I understood that your main interest in life is to please Almighty God and you do this through personal actions as well as charity. You believe the Tanakh, totally, and do your best to understand the original intention of the Hebrew text regarding important verses. Probably the most outstanding issue for you is the ransom sacrifice of Jesus and the texts it is based on: Isaiah 53; Isaiah 7:14; Psalm 22; Daniel 9 etc.

Yakov: Lon, you got my beliefs and priorities right. I wish to state that I have studied the Talmud, Kabala & Jewish traditions in depth and appreciate the thought behind the efforts Jews have made to honor G-d. I however wish to stick to the Tanakh and study the passages Christians claim are about Jesus that are essential to establish that...

- Jesus is the Jewish messiah promised in Tanakh.
- He was the son of G-d in a special way.
- Jesus came to the earth 2000 years ago as part of the plan G-d had to save the world through him.
- That Jesus died as prophesied in Tanakh to save mankind from their sins.

Over a period of 7 months, Ronnie, Yakov and I would meet on Zoom, maintain a running dialogue on a WhatsApp chat, "Tanakh Talk," and exchange emails. In the meantime, I documented all of it. So, while formulating answers to Yakov's questions things just grew organically and, before I knew it, when I organized my notes, emails, and WhatsApp chats, I found I had nearly 200 pages... Lo and behold, a book!

As is clear from the above, Yakov is steeped in Jewish points of view, objections, and counterarguments, most of which he gets from outreach websites and YouTube Rabbinic apologists. I find these sources can be less than honest with their audiences. They use bait and switch tactics, misdirection, withhold pertinent information and then accuse Christians of employing those same tactics. And the last line of so many of them — or perhaps, I should say the *bottom line* — is a pitch for contributions: “Friends, you can help me prevent the missionaries from converting our Jewish brothers by sending your contributions to... [then up comes the intermittent flashing address and phone number].” Christian apologists are apt to do the same, but in the opposite direction. It’s like Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers doing the same steps but in reverse. Monetizing is the name of the game and, along the way, with their videos, books and websites, many become millionaires.

And Yakov responds, “God bless them!” (But not necessarily referring to both sides.)

The academics, less motivated by religious ardor, tend to be more serious in their research and honest in their conclusions. But they too have their biases. Personally, when it comes to sources, the ancient Talmudic expression works for me, “Kabdehu ve hashdehu” (Honor him and suspect him). And if you find a source you trust, just continue to “honor and suspect [verify].” So says the psalmist, “Do not put your trust in princes nor in a son of man, who cannot bring salvation.” (Psalm 146:3) Now you know who I am and who Yakov is... but why focus on Isaiah 52:13-53:12?

Of all the topics we discussed, about twenty, Isaiah 52/53 is by far the most important in relation to Jesus’ messiahship. The passage describes God’s “Servant” who would eventually be highly exalted after suffering many trials. Christians say the Servant is the Messiah (Jesus), and Jews say the Servant is Israel; competing explanations for the same passage. Isaiah 52/53 is the passage from the Tanakh most cited in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) as “proof” that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and it is also the most controversial. It is viewed as a prophecy detailing Jesus’ life, his mission, death, resurrection, and the promise that he would return as King of God’s Kingdom. The passage so resembles the Gospel accounts of Jesus that many Israelis who read it for the first time say: “That’s Yeshu!” (Israeli name for Jesus). Just recently, my Jewish nephew (60 years old) read Isaiah 52/53 for the first time and had the same reaction: “That’s obviously Jesus.”

Most Christians would probably find themselves at a loss trying to answer Jewish arguments that challenge Christian views and allegations that Christians have willfully mistranslated passages in the Tanakh to support their faith. Many may not have examined Isaiah 52/53 in depth, or other messianic text in the Tanakh, because they already believe Jesus was sent by God so, “Why go into it?” But we should dig into these things “as for hidden treasures,” to “find the knowledge of God.”—Proverbs 2:4, 5.

For this reason, I decided to make my answers to Yakov’s questions available to those who find themselves out of their depth when confronted with Jewish objections. In an effort to formulate a robust reply to each of Yakov’s questions, the information turned out to be exhaustive, and I confess, *exhausting* (my apologies in advance). Though some of the information is available from different sources, much is unique, a product of personal research born out of an effort to answer Yakov’s questions and help him understand that there are sound answers to the Jewish objections he advances, and that there is much more to the question of Jesus’ messiahship than the anti-missionary

websites and YouTuber rabbis would have it, especially regarding the identity of God's Servant in Isaiah 52/53.

My objective: The purpose of this book is threefold. To answer Jewish objections to the Christian view that Jesus is the Servant foretold in Isaiah 52/53. Along with that, to lay bare the depth of this inspiring prophecy that can lead to a more meaningful and richer faith in Jesus as the Messiah; the one prophesied to give his life as a ransom and to return as King of God's Kingdom and realize all the blessings for mankind promised in God's Word. And third, to answer the Jewish objections advanced by Yakov on the other topics we discussed.

I sincerely hope that both Jews and Christians alike find the answers we have provided to Yakov's questions on Isaiah 52/53 – as well as the other 20 or so topics – reasonable, coherent and, most importantly, faith strengthening.

A word to those who are not Jehovah's Witnesses: I hope you are not put off from reading this book because my choice of religion is different from yours. The book is meant as an aid to Christians of all denominations. Whatever your religious persuasion may be, you will see that this work is laser focused on the shared belief that Jesus is the "Servant" prophesied in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the promised Messiah and savior of all those who put faith in him.

Why you should read this book: Basically, you should read *this* book because it's free. You can always buy other books on the subject if, and when, you desire. But free is good, so why not start here?

I would be pleased to receive your comments, questions, objections and criticisms. Feel free to write me at: lonkoenig@gmail.com. (But write soon, I'm 79 years old!)

NOTE: The topics Ronnie and I discussed with Yakov are presented according to what I felt would be most interesting and of immediate concern to the reader. Of course, that is a judgment call on my part, so feel free to start with the topic that piques your curiosity the most. Start with the epilogue if you like, even though this isn't a novel. Most of the articles are independent of one another and information may be repeated as it relates to a particular topic.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Abbreviations of ancient manuscript sources quoted herein

- *MT*: Masoretic Text. The authoritative Hebrew and Aramaic text of the *Tanakh*. (the Hebrew Bible) The oldest manuscript fragments of the *MT* date from around the 9th Century CE.
- *LXX*, also called the *Septuagint*: Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made in the 3rd and 2nd Centuries BCE.
- *Vg*: Latin Translation of the entire Bible, translated mainly by Jerome in 382 CE.
- *Targum*: Aramaic translation and semi commentary of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- *Sy Peshitta*: A Syriac translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made in the 2nd Century CE.
- *1QIs^a*: The "Great Isaiah Scroll," found at Qumran, Israel, in 1947. Dating from about 100 BCE, it is a thousand years older than all other Hebrew manuscripts that were known until the Dead Sea manuscripts were discovered.

Abbreviations of Bible Translations quoted herein

- *Alter*: Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (2019).
- *JSB*: *Jewish Study Bible* (2014).
- *Leeser*: Rabbi Isaac Leeser *Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (1853).
- *Tanakh-JPS*: *Tanakh-Jewish Publication Society Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (1985).
- *JPS-Tanakh*: *Jewish Publication Society Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (1917).
- *Artscroll*: *English Tanakh with insights from classic Rabbinic thought* (Stone Edition, 2023).
- *Chabad*: *Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* by Chabad organization (2001).
- *NW*: *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, by Jehovah's Witnesses (2023).
- *NIV*: *New International Version* (2011).
- *NASB*: *New American Standard Bible* (2020).
- *YLT*: *Young's Literal Translation* (2014).
- *AMP*: *Amplified Bible* (2015).

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

— CHAPTER 1 — THE BIG CONTROVERSY - THE SERVANT IN ISAIAH 52/53

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

Orthodox Judaism views Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as a prophecy about Israel's eventual exaltation on the world stage and its role in *healing the nations* during the Messianic Age. Yakov, and many others, sees Israel's rise to world prominence since 1948 as the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy. Israel's many woes throughout the ages are explained as the fulfillment of the prophesied *sufferings of the Servant*.

Proponents of this interpretation see the immediate context preceding the Servant passage as a Messianic Age prophecy leading naturally into the Servant passage which begins in Isaiah 52:13. The Orthodox Jewish sees this as a description of Israel's "exaltation" followed by the reaction of the gentile kings who are stunned by what they see. According to this view, Isaiah chapter 53 is a continuation of the preceding chapter, also set in the Messianic Age, and the narrators are the kings and gentiles seen in Isaiah 52:15, who are now speaking among themselves about all that Israel, the Servant, had gone through until finally being "exalted" and accepted internationally as "a light to the nations."

Part and parcel of the above interpretation is that Jewish suffering, from the time of the Babylonian captivity through the Crusades and the Holocaust (2500+ years), has been God's way of "inspiring" Israel to repent and return to Torah. This is reflected in articles like *Isaiah 53 – The Suffering Servant*: "God desired to oppress the Jewish people, in order to inspire them to return to Torah observance."

The unparalleled history of Jewish suffering makes this explanation a difficult pill to swallow, something many Jews agree with. However, Jewry cannot reject that explanation outright without letting go of the claim that they are God's chosen people. How else could Jewish suffering be explained and the claim to be God's chosen people still be held on to? So they are stuck with the explanation, and this is a dilemma.

The Orthodox interpretation of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is based on several suppositions:

- The context of Isaiah 52:1-12 leads naturally to the conclusion that Israel is the Servant mentioned in Isaiah 52:13-15.
- The context of Isaiah 52/53 fits Israel as the “Servant” who is being spoken about by the kings and nations mentioned in the previous verses.
- Israel’s suffering has been God’s way of leading his “chosen people” to repentance and a return to Torah. Only after Israel repents will their suffering end, the Messianic Age begin, all Jews (including the *ten lost tribes*) regathered to the land of Israel and God’s “Servant/Israel,” will then be glorified before the eyes of all the gentile nations.
- God cannot be accused of *causing* harm to his “chosen people” for allowing them to suffer: The Babylonians, Romans, Christians, numerous other nations and the Nazis are the ones that persecuted them.

Even though, “God didn’t do it,” is a common reply, the above quoted article that says, “*God* desired to oppress the Jewish people,” follows Rashi (a leading biblical exegete in the Middle Ages) who wrote, “[God] wished to crush him [the Servant, Israel] and to cause him to repent.”

∞ ∞ ∞

THE SERVANT PASSAGE

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

Jewish Publication Society-Tanakh

52:13 Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. **14** According as many were appalled at thee— so marred was his visage unlike that of a man, and his form unlike that of the sons of men— **15** So shall he startle many nations, Kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they perceive. **53:1** ‘Who would have believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the LORD been revealed? **2** For he shot up right forth as a sapling, and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form nor comeliness, that we should look upon him, nor beauty that we should delight in him. **3** He was despised, and forsaken of men, a man of pains, and acquainted with disease, and as one from whom men hide their face: He was despised, and we esteemed him not. **4** Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pains he carried; whereas we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. **5** But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities: The chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed. **6** All we like sheep did go astray, we turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath made to light on him the iniquity of us all. **7** He was oppressed, though he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth. **8** By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and with his generation who did reason? For he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due. **9** And they made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich his tomb; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.’ **10** Yet it pleased the LORD to crush him by disease; to see if his soul would offer itself in restitution, that he might see his seed, prolong his days, and that the purpose of the LORD might prosper by his hand: **11** Of the travail of his soul he shall see to the full, even My servant, who by his knowledge did justify the Righteous One to the many, and their iniquities he did bear. **12** Therefore will I divide him a portion among the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the mighty; because he bared his soul unto death, and was

numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

THE SERVANT – AN INDIVIDUAL OR ISRAEL?

The following is a discussion with Yakov on some basic questions regarding the general context of Isaiah.

Yakov: “There are four “servant songs” in Isaiah that refer to Israel/Isaiah; Isaiah 42, 49, 50 and 53. Logically, if the first three are about Israel and Isaiah, couldn’t the fourth also be about Israel?”

NOTE: Yakov is correct in saying, “There are four ‘servant songs’ in Isaiah,” but the rest of what he says is off the mark. Isaiah only refers to Israel twice in the Servant Songs (Isaiah 42 and 49), and Isaiah is called “my Servant” only once in Isaiah 49:3. I dealt with the thrust of his question in my answer rather than spend time on the inaccuracies.

Answer: Naturally, Isaiah 52:13-53:12 *could* be about Israel (or Isaiah), but is it? There are 17 “servant” passages from Isaiah chapter 21-53, and the Servant goes unnamed in three of them.

Some factors to consider: *Servant* is a generic term appearing over 60 times in the Tanakh in reference to 11 different individuals: Abraham, Moses, Caleb, David, Job, Isaiah, Eliakim, collective Israel (also referred to as Jacob and Jeshurun), Nebuchadnezzar, Zerubbabel, and an unnamed individual, also called “Sprout.” The term is obviously not exclusive to Israel but can apply to different ones, similar to other generic terms like “chosen one” and “saviour.” I have not seen Jewish outreach articles or YouTuber rabbis mention this fact.

Yakov: Having understood that Isaiah 52:1-12 that G-d is talking about Israel, why do you think verse 13 is about Jesus?

Answer: Israel is the focus of Isaiah 52:1-12 set in the context of Israel’s return to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity. The prophecy was fulfilled when King Cyrus liberated the Jews in 537 BCE. Here are a few reasons why the Servant is not Israel. (Discussed in greater detail in *A Verse-By-Verse Examination of Isaiah 52:13-53:12* below.)

The grammar, word choice and expressions used in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 all point to viewing the Servant as an individual and not a group. This was the Rabbinic view till the end of the 11th Century. Even today, Jewish religious groups, scholars and individuals view the passage as referring to an *individual*, even the Messiah... though, of course, not Jesus.¹

The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (article *Servant of God: Special usage in Isaiah*) comments, “The descriptions... of the attitude and conduct of the ‘ebed [servant] Yhwh’ [in Isaiah chapters 42:1-4; 44:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12] seem to be idealizations of the character of an individual rather than of the whole of Israel. Especially is this true of Isa. 52:13-53:12, the exaltation of the ‘man of suffering.’ In this a prophetic anticipatory picture of the Messiah has been recognized by both Jewish and Christian tradition.”

Jewish scholar and Bible translator, Robert Alter, writes: “A recurrent Jewish view sees him [the servant] as a representative of collective Israel, but the details of the passage argue for an individual, and already in the Middle Ages Abraham Iben Ezra proposed that the Servant was the prophet [Isaiah] himself.”²

- Abrupt changes of subject matter are common in Isaiah, so the immediate context of a passage does not guarantee that what follows is about the same person or event (see Addendum 5).
- Importantly, of the nine times in Isaiah that Israel is referred to as “my servant,” the nation is mentioned by name. However, nowhere in Isaiah 52/53 is Israel identified as the Servant. The “context” argument is a poor one in light of this fact.

More detailed consideration as to why Jesus was identified as the Servant in the 1st Century is presented in succeeding discussions.

∞ ∞ ∞

A VERSE-BY-VERSE EXAMINATION OF ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

The Jewish position on the passage:

- Isaiah 52:1-12 is a prophecy about the Messianic Age.
- Isaiah 52:13-15 is about Israel’s future exaltation in relation to the Messianic Age.
- Isaiah 53:1-9 the kings and nations that were startled at the Servant’s exaltation speak among themselves about Israel *after* its exaltation, in the Messianic Age.

Many assumptions must be accepted to justify the Jewish position. Some have been addressed above while others are dealt with more fully in the following analysis as well as in the Addendums.

The Jewish interpretation assumes that...

- ...the context of Isaiah 52:1-12 is a Messianic Age prophecy.
- ...the ten tribes did not return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile but will do so in the Messianic Age.
- ...the narrators in Isaiah 53:1-10 are the kings/nations talking about Israel and not repentant Jews talking about the Servant.
- ...God has allowed “his chosen people” to suffer unimaginable persecution for 2500+ years to “bring them back to Torah.”
- ...Israel, a warrior nation, somehow fits the description of the Servant in Isaiah 53:7, 9, “...he let himself be afflicted... like a sheep to the slaughter... silent before its shearers, and he would not open his mouth... 9 he had done no violence.”

The Christian position on the passage:

- Isaiah 52:1-12 is a restoration prophecy about the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity in 537 BCE, including the ten tribes.
- Isaiah 52:13-15 refers to the “exaltation” of God’s Servant, the Messiah when resurrected, and even further in the Messianic Age.
- Isaiah 53:1-10 is a discussion among Israelite disciples of the Servant (or those that had been but left), *after* his death. (Compare John 6:66.)

NOTE: Most of the following discussion on Isaiah 52/53 came at the tail end of our interaction with Yakov. But it is placed at the beginning of the book because of the

overwhelming significance it bears on the question of the Messiah and because of the interest Christians and Jews show in the passage.

The following analysis is divided into two parts, giving each of Yakov's questions due consideration.

Part 1: How the verse in question favors the identification of the Servant as an individual rather than collective Israel, as well as consideration of translation issues.

Part 2: Answers are given to Yakov's questions and objections as to how Jesus fits the description of the Servant in the verse under consideration.

Two different translations of each verse are provided: the *New World Translation (NW)* and the Jewish Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) *Chabad Translation* (other translations are consulted to clarify contentious translation issues).

The following verse-by-verse consideration is based on our discussions and Yakov's extensive notes. I have added "Notes" here and there for general clarification, and others pointing out possible underlying reasons for some of Yakov's conclusions, objections, and questions.

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 52:13—

INTRODUCTION TO 52:13-53:12: The theme of the Servant passage: The mission, suffering, and exaltation of the *Servant* of Jehovah. The passage is divided into 5 sections of 3 verses each. Section 1 is prophetic; a condensed description of a transformed Servant who the surprised political rulers must face. The 2nd-4th sections describe the Servant's mission, suffering and death. And the final section returns to his accomplishments and reward.

NW: "Look! My servant will act with insight [הִנֵּה יִשְׁכִּיל עַבְדִּי]. He will be in high station and will certainly be elevated and exalted very much."

Chabad: "Behold My servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and he shall be very high."

"**Act with insight/wisely/prudently.**" Hebrew, *hiskeel*, refers to prosperity obtained by intelligent action, never to prosperity without effort. (Compare Joshua 1:8; Jeremiah 10:21.) The Servant's *exaltation* is the consequence of insightful and wise action. In modern Hebrew, the word *sechel* (the same root as *hiskeel*) can mean sharp/brainy, and is associated with intelligence in accomplishing things.

"**High... elevated... exalted very much.**" The three verbs denote commencement, continuation, and climax of the exaltation. "Very much," (מאד) denotes the immeasurable height to which the Servant is exalted.

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov-1. If Jesus is the Son of G-d, what does *prosperity* mean for him since he owns everything that exists? 2. Similarly in the case of his exaltation and being lifted up. I think there is a passage in John where Jesus asks G-d to exalt him to his original

position. 3 There is a passage that says that the universe was created through him and for him. So, what does he not have that G-d should give him?

NOTE: Yakov knows enough of the Christian Scriptures to be critical but without understanding the full context of what he is criticizing. He generally lifts his questions and objections from Jewish anti-missionary articles without checking to see if they are valid.

Answer 1-3: The text refers to Jesus' being rewarded for his faithful course as God's Servant. (Compare Isaiah 53:10-12.) Jesus "acted with insight," he understood what was required of him and was guided by the Scriptures to accomplish God's will. (John 17:4 and 19:30) In just 3½ years he started the greatest *marketing* campaign the world has ever seen. No mean feat! (I believe you were alluding to Colossians 1:15, 16 in your comment about the universe being created through Jesus.)

Jesus asked only to be restored to his original position but was exalted to a superior position. (Acts 2:34-36) He was "elevated and exalted very much" as King of God's Kingdom, sitting on the throne of David.

- **Philippians 2:9** "For this very reason, God *exalted him to a superior position* and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name."
- **Matthew 28:18** "[Jesus said] 'All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth.'"

Jesus was only given "all authority" (a "superior position") after his resurrection.

1Timothy 6:16 shows that Jesus also received immortality, which he did not possess prior to his mission on earth.

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 52:14—

NW: "Just as there were many who stared at him in amazement — for his appearance was disfigured more than that of any other man and his stately form more than that of mankind."

Chabad: "As many wondered about you [עַל־מַּוְּךְ עַל־יְהוָה], "How marred his appearance is from that of a man, and his features from that of people!"

Translation issue: Judgment call.

- "him": *Tanakh-JPS* and *Alter* follow the *Targum*, *Sy Peshitta*, *1Qis^a*
- "you": *Leeser* and *JPS-Tanakh* follow the *MT*, *LXX*, *Vg*

The political leaders are amazed at seeing that the Servant has been transformed and exalted.

"Disfigured more than that of any other man." The Servant had been discredited, grossly underestimated and misrepresented.

Yakov: Many will wonder how this servant who was so marred and did *not even look like a nation* [people] that G-d chose them to be his people. For centuries, Israel has been projected as pigs, devils, people with animal heads etc.

NOTE: Another issue becomes evident from this point on: Yakov reads interpretations into the verse as if they were part of it. He merely repeats the Jewish position instead of offering reasons for his point of view. This is exactly what Roth does in his article, *Isaiah 53 – The Suffering Servant*. (See Addendum 3.)

Answer: The text says, “marred/disfigured more than that of a *man*,” the word “nation” is not in the text.

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov: When this servant is elevated, the nations will be shocked and shut their mouths. If this was talking about Jesus, why would the nations be shocked? They have been expecting him for the last 2000 years, right?

Answer: Only 15 of the world’s 195 nations have adopted Christianity as the state religion, and only a third of the world’s population identify as Christian. None of the national leaders, including “Christian nations,” take seriously Jesus’ return as the exalted King of God’s Kingdom. And why should they? The clergy has mainly depicted Jesus either as a babe in a manger or an emaciated man on a cross. And for centuries, “Christian” religious leaders have meddled in politics and blessed national armies, even when these were warring against their “Christian” brothers (take Russia and Ukraine for example). National leaders of all stripes will therefore be blindsided, “amazed,” at the transformed and exalted Jesus, who returns to take the reins of rulership out of the hands of world leaders and remove them from power once and for all.

Yakov: How can this apply to Jesus; he was never projected as a disfigured or lowly person? He was sought by all the people and only in the last 24 hours he was marred.

Answer: The Servant’s “marred appearance,” “disfigurement,” refers to his character, not his physical appearance. Isaiah 53:12 says, “...[he] was counted among the transgressors; he carried the sin of many people, and he interceded for the transgressors.” This fits Jesus. Throughout his entire ministry (not just his last day!), Jewish religious leaders painted a distorted picture of his reputation, marring/disfiguring, his image. They said he was a lawbreaker, Sabbath violator, mad, demon possessed, blasphemer, false Christ, a menace to the Jewish nation and a seditionist.

He was finally condemned, tortured, and executed as a seditionist and was said to be rejected by God. Since the nations had no reason to expect Jesus to return at all, they would naturally be “amazed” at his return in *any* form, let alone a more powerful form. When he does return in power, the amazed onlookers will include professed Christians who believe he is on their side regardless of their crimes.—Matthew 7:21-23.

- **John 15:18-25** “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you... 20 Keep in mind the word I said to you: If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you... 25 But this happened in order to fulfill the word written in their Law: ‘They hated me without cause.’” (Compare Psalm 69:4.)

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 52:15—

NW: “So he will startle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths before him, because they will see what they had not been told and give consideration to what they had not heard.”

Chabad: “So shall he cast down [‘startle,’ *Tanakh-JPS*] many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for, what had not been told them they saw, and [at] what they had not heard they gazed.”

“He will startle... Kings will shut their mouths.” The nations and their kings are speechless at the Servant’s surprising exaltation.

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov-1. Isaiah 52:15 talks about what will happen when the servant is elevated. For 2,000 years 2.2 billion Christians and 1.5 billion Muslims are waiting for Jesus to return. So, why would they be shocked when the servant is revealed/elevated? 2. This is a Messianic Age passage that is yet to happen, when it does, all the Gentiles will be shocked.

Answer 1-2: “They will see what *they had not been told.*” Neither the Jewish religious leaders in Jesus’ day, nor Christian leaders since the 4th Century, ever informed the “kings” of what to expect regarding Jesus. Most Christian religions believe in Jesus’ return half-heartedly at best, and they might secretly prefer he wouldn’t return to hold them accountable for their deeds. If they were truly *waiting*, they wouldn’t be *warring*. The majority of Christians today are *practical atheists*; meaning their lives differ little from that of many atheists. They give lip service to Jesus, but, in many cases, their religious beliefs are subordinate to their political ideals and goals. As far as Muslims are concerned, not only does the Quran explain Jesus’ return very differently than the Christian Scriptures, but each of the branches of Islam interpret Jesus’ return differently. So Muslims too will be surprised at Jesus’ return in power and glory when they “see what they had not been told.”

Yakov: One can say that when Jesus comes, the Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and atheists will be shocked and that is fine. But the Tanakh *never* refers to Jews as nations. It is *always* used for Gentiles.

NOTE: Misconceptions regarding Hebrew terminology popup repeatedly in Yakov’s statements.

Answer: The Jews are also referred to as a nation(s): Genesis 12:2; 46:3; Deuteronomy 26:5. (See also Genesis 17:4,5; 25:23; 35:11; Psalm 22:28; 72:17; 82:8; 113:4). Since Jews have been taught that Israel is the Servant and they are the “chosen people,” Israel will be among the nations that are most shocked when Jesus returns in power as the exalted Servant.

- **Revelation 1:7; 6:15-17** “Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and those who pierced him; and all the *tribes* of the earth will beat themselves in grief because of him... Then the kings of the earth... and every free person... keep saying... 17 ‘the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 53: Section 2. The narrators are looking back on the Servant's life; verbs are in the past tense. They realize the truthfulness of the prophecies concerning the Servant and discuss his resolve in enduring trials, his concern for others and his suffering on their behalf. Verse 1 describes their despondency as followers of the Servant.

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:1—

NW: “Who has put faith in the thing heard by us? And as for the arm of Jehovah, to whom has it been revealed?”

Chabad: “Who would have believed our report, and to whom was the arm of the Lord revealed?”

Yakov: The nations are saying, ‘If G-d had not shown us what we were not told, we might not have understood what we were seeing, and we would not have believed that Israel would once again be elevated by G-d.’

Answer: Yakov's idea that the kings/nations are the narrators in Isaiah 53:1-10, is at the heart of the Jewish position: If this is so, then the Servant must be collective Israel. On the other hand, if the narrators are Israelites who are commenting on the Servant's mission and his death, it means the Servant is an individual, and that makes Jesus the most likely candidate as the one who fulfilled the prophecy. Because of the importance of the identity of the narrators in Isaiah 53 in relation to identifying the Servant, it is a point of focus throughout the following analysis.

Here are just a few reasons why the narrators are not the kings and nations mentioned in 52:15.

- Although Yakov explains what the “The nations are *saying*...,” the kings/nations never speak in the previous verses. And, since the exaltation of the Servant renders them speechless in Isaiah 52:15 – they “shut their mouths” – there is no reason to suppose they find their voice and begin speaking in chapter 53.
- God is the one speaking in Isaiah 52:13-15, but not in 53:1-10. This marks a scenario change; the narrators and subject matter are different from the previous verses.
- If the speakers were the kings/nations in Isaiah 53, you would expect them to make some mention of the Servant's exaltation, an event so spectacular that it *amazed, startled and struck them dumb*. But nothing at all is said about it.
- The conversation in Isaiah 53:1-10 is in the past tense, *prior* to the Servant's exaltation, and the narrators have no notion of it.

“the thing heard by us/from us.” A report or rumor. The narrators in Isaiah 53:1 are dismayed because the message they told to others had not been taken seriously: “Who has put faith in the thing heard from us?” The kings/nations would not have been able to tell others about what they *heard* because they had only *seen* a visible display of the glorified Servant. Prior to that event, they “had *not* been *told*... *not heard*” the facts regarding the Servant. (Compare Isaiah 53:2-10.)

“the arm of Jehovah.” There is no basis to suppose the gentile kings would use a Hebrew expression that includes God's personal name. Why would the kings/nations

know God's name? And even if they did, why would they associate it with the Jews who haven't been pronouncing the name for nearly 2000 years and even banned pronouncing it?

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

For over 1800 years the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 was understood to be an individual. The Talmud and rabbinic sages mention some ten individuals, apart from the Messiah, suggested as candidates for the Servant: Job, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hezekiah, Josiah, Cyrus, Ezekiel, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Iben Ezra.

However, none of the above suggestions were ever widely accepted because they do not fit the description of the Servant of Isaiah 53. As the analysis of Isaiah 52/53 progresses, bear in mind the Servant's personality, mission and other details described in the passage: He is kind, self-sacrificing, mission oriented for the good of others, etc. This is exactly how Jesus is depicted in the Christian Scriptures and the details of the prophecy point naturally to him.

“Who has put faith in the thing heard by us?”

- **John 12:37, 38** “And although such signs as these he had done before them they were not believing on him: 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which said—Lord! who believed what we have heard? And the arm of the Lord to whom was it revealed?”—*Rotherham*.
- **Romans 10:16** “But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” —*Rotherham*.

As mentioned, the perspective of the narrators in Isaiah 53 is shortly *after* the Servant's death but *before* he is exalted. (Isaiah 52:13-15) In Shavuot/Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, the crowd that was gathered in Jerusalem realized that Jesus, the Messiah, had been wrongly executed, and that had been *exalted* by God.

- **Acts 2:33, 36-41** “Therefore, because he was *exalted* to the right hand of God... let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you executed on a stake.’ 37 Now when they heard this, *they were stabbed to the heart*, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: ‘Men, brothers, *what should we do?*’ 38 Peter said to them: ‘Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of your sins’... 41 So those who gladly accepted his word were baptized, and on that day about 3,000 people were added.”

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:2—

NW: “He will come up like a twig before him, like a root out of parched land. No stately form does he have, nor any splendor; and when we see him, his appearance does not draw us to him.”

Chabad: “And he came up like a sapling before it, and like a root from dry ground, he had neither form nor comeliness; and we saw him that he had no appearance. Now shall we desire him?” (This last sentence is not a question in other translations; *Tanakh-JPS, Leeser, Alter, Artscroll*.)

“...like a twig... like a root out of parched land...” The phrase refers to the Servant’s beginnings, unimpressive, not likely to succeed. This is similar to Isaiah 11:1 which also depicts lowly and unimpressive beginnings: “A twig will grow out of the stump of Jesse, and a sprout from his roots will bear fruit.”

This verse has a long history as a messianic reference. The description fits the humble background of someone who was not expected to amount to much. If applied to Israel, it could only be to the nation’s *beginnings*; from nomadic patriarchs to being a slave nation in Egypt. It does not, however, fit any time after Israel’s liberation from Egypt and conquest of the land of Israel since the nation enjoyed centuries of glory during the reigns of David, Solomon, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah etc. Israel later became a nation *overnight* after its release from Babylon. (Compare Isaiah 66:8.) It is difficult to imagine Israel’s lowly beginnings as a noteworthy topic in the context of a Messianic Age prophecy.

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

“No stately form does he have, nor any splendor...”

Yakov-1. The servant in Isaiah was insignificant and had no favourable conditions to flourish. 2. He did not have any comeliness or a pleasing appearance that one would desire him.

Answer 1-2: Exactly, and this is the very point the narrators are making. They are comparing the Servant’s humble beginnings with what he finally turned out to be. This fits Jesus: He was born in a barn in Bethlehem, a town so insignificant it wasn’t even listed in the accounts of the tribal divisions. (Micah 5:2) His family was poor: they offered a poor person’s sacrifice at his birth, “...a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:24) It was a large family living in modest circumstances. (Matthew 13:55, 56) People in Nazareth said, “Is this not the carpenter’s son?... So they began to stumble because of him.”—Matthew 13:55-57.

“...like a root out of parched land. His *roots* were in Nazareth, which seemed like the wrong soil to many. It was a city in the north of Israel, not a center of learning, so Jesus had no legitimacy in people’s eyes, no “stately form.” Many expected that the Messiah would have a more impressive background.

- **John 1:46** “[Can] anything good come from Nazareth?”
- **John 7:52** Religious leaders said to Nicodemus who attempted to defend Jesus, “...are you too from Nazareth?”

Yakov: Jesus, on the contrary, was the most popular person for 2000 years. He was all over Judea and Galilee healing, preaching and doing miracles and everyone was dying to see him, get healed, fed or taught.

Answer: Jesus was pretty much a side show for the majority. They wanted to see miracles, eat, and get healed (as you say), but the majority weren’t drawn to him as the Messiah. Eventually, the religious leaders influenced the people to reject him, and in the end, the crowds shouted for Pilate to spare Barabbas instead of Jesus.

- **John 1:11** “He came to his own home, but his own people did not accept him.”
- **John 7:41-48** “Others were saying: ‘This is the Christ.’ But some were saying: ‘The Christ is not actually coming out of Galilee, is he?’... 43 So a division over

him arose among the crowd... 45 Then the officers went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, and the latter said to them: 'Why did you not bring him in?' 46 The officers replied: 'Never has any man spoken like this.' 47 In turn the Pharisees answered: 'You have not been misled also, have you? 48 Not one of the rulers or of the Pharisees has put faith in him, has he?'"

- **John 12:37, 38** "Although he had performed so many signs before them, they were not putting faith in him, 38 so that the word of Isaiah the prophet [Isaiah 53:1] might be fulfilled, who said: 'Jehovah, who has put faith in the thing heard from us.'"

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:3—

NW: "He was despised and was avoided by men [אִישִׁים], a man meant for pains and for having acquaintance with sickness [חֲלֵי יָדוּעַ]. And there was as if the concealing of one's face from us. He was despised, and we held him as of no account."

Chabad: "...despised and rejected by men, a man of pains and accustomed to illness, and as one who hides his face from us, despised and we held him of no account."

"...avoided by men [*chadal ishim*]..." Literally, "he lacked men," meaning important/influential people, no respectable men of authority were backing the Servant.

"...acquaintance with sickness." Meaning, he was placed in a situation where he would be in contact with disease.

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov-1. Jesus was the most popular person in the history of this planet, but this passage says just the opposite about the servant, that he is rejected by men. 2. Isaiah clearly says that the servant is so insignificant that *no one* thought him worthy.

Answer: 1-2: Isaiah does not say "*no one* thought him worthy," rather, he says that "...we held him as of no account." In his own day, Jesus was not valued as the Messiah, even by some disciples who abandoned him. (See John 6:66 below.) That he was rejected is obvious, otherwise he would not have been executed. (See texts above.) He received no support among the ruling classes, and the masses only accorded him token acceptance as long as he would feed them, and even then, they finally abandoned him (See texts above.) It was only centuries later that Jesus became *popular*.

- **John 6:26** "Jesus answered them and said: 'Most truly I say to you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate from the loaves and were satisfied.'"

"...as one from whom we would hide our faces..." (*Artscroll*) Jesus looked people in the face but his opposers refused to see him favorably.—Mark 3:5 and 10:21.

"...of no account..." Jesus was betrayed for the price of a slave, 30 pieces of silver. Zechariah refers to this sum ironically as a "majestic value." (Zechariah 11:12, 13) The

crowd rejected Jesus in favor of the criminal Barabbas, considering him more valuable than Jesus.

- **John 6:60-66** “When they heard this, many of his disciples said: ‘This speech is shocking; who can listen to it?’ 61 But Jesus... said to them: ‘Does this stumble you? 62 What if you should see the Son of man ascending to where he was before?’... 66 Because of this, many of his disciples went off to the things behind and would no longer walk with him.”

Yakov: In spite of Jesus’ popularity among the Jews, for some weird reason he is rejected by these same people.

Answer: There is no mystery as to why people finally rejected Jesus, the religious leaders influenced them to do so. (John 7:47-49, above) However, by the 4th Century, Jesus’ popularity had been coopted by the clergy. They disfigured his appearance even further by turning him into the foremost patron of war: Constantine’s war cry was, “*in hoc signo vinces*,” “in this sign, [the cross] shall you conquer.” Later there were crusades and inquisitions all done in the name of Jesus.

Yakov-1. This passage uses words that say *all his life* the servant is despised. 2. The Servant is accustomed to pain *all his life*. This is not talking about Jesus’ suffering for 6 hours before dying.

Answer 1-2: Not sure where you get the expression “all his life” from. You are reading something into the text that isn’t there.

“...**a man meant for pains and for having acquaintance with sickness.**” During his ministry, Jesus was like a caring physician, curing people and relieving bodily pains. He never shunned those who were ailing physically or spiritually. But he focused especially on spiritual maladies and the pain of a guilty conscience.

- **Luke 19:10** [Jesus to Zacchaeus, a tax collector] “The Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (See Luke 19:1-9 for context.)
- **Luke 5:30-32** “At this the Pharisees and their scribes began murmuring to his disciples, saying: ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ 31 In reply Jesus said to them: ‘Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but those who are ill do. 32 I have come to call, not righteous people, but sinners to repentance.’”

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:4—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:4: Section 3 begins here. The narrators reflect on what Jesus did, what he went through and their own response to it all.

NW: “**Truly he himself carried our sicknesses, and he bore our pains. But we considered him as plagued** [נגוע], **stricken by God** [מכה אלהים] **and afflicted.**”

Chabad: “**Indeed, he bore our illnesses, and our pains-he carried them, yet we accounted him as plagued, smitten by God and oppressed.**”

“**Our sins he carried** [נשא]” The kings/nations would not have used a term taken straight out of the Mosaic Law. The Hebrew word transmits the idea of *tolerating* and

carrying, feeling the sin as one's own (compare Leviticus 5:1), or *bearing* the punishment occasioned by sin. (Leviticus 17:16; 20:19-20; 24:15) The term can also refer to bearing sin in a mediatorial capacity when the person is not the guilty party. (Leviticus 10:17) The Servant's mission was to relieve sicknesses and pains in all their forms. These, and similar phrases in succeeding texts, are said in relation to the Servant's life which was offered as a "guilt offering."—Isaiah 53:10.

"Plagued [נגוע]," generally describes leprosy. Quoting Isaiah 53:4, Sanhedrin 98b says: "The leper of the house of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi is his [the Servant's] name, as it is stated: 'Indeed our illnesses he did bear and our pains he endured; yet we did esteem him injured, stricken by God, and afflicted.'" This underscores that the passage was originally understood as referring to an individual and not to the nation of Israel.

The narrators had personally benefited from the Servant's labors, but lamented not grasping the full import of his mission, viewing him as "stricken by God."

SOME QUESTIONS: If, as alleged, the kings and nations are the ones here commenting on how the Servant/Israel bore the illnesses of the gentile nations and carried their pains, I would ask...

- What were the "illnesses" of the nations that Israel bore and the "pains" it carried?
- How exactly did Israel "bear" the illnesses and "carry" the pains of the gentile nations?"

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov: Jesus had a glorious life and only in the last 24 hours he went through the trials.

Answer: "A glorious life?" As a youth he worked with his father as a carpenter; hard life, no luxuries. When he began his ministry, Jesus worked tirelessly to start a preaching campaign that has lasted till our day, nearly 2000 years. He made 2 tours of Galilee, 1 tour of Galilee and Judea, 1 tour East of the Jordan and a final ministry in Jerusalem. He walked the length and breadth of Israel without letup. Some estimate that he traveled some 3000 miles during that time. And he did this with the weight of the world on his shoulders, mankind's fate hanging in the balance, as well as the dishonor and pain he would cause his heavenly father if he failed in his mission. Finally, he died a terrible death at age 33. No marriage, no family, not even a home to call his own. Not such a *glorious life* in the normal sense. But *glorious* in another, he "conquered the world."—John 16:33.

Yakov: Was Jesus afflicted by a plague?

Answer: Jesus was *regarded* as plagued/stricken, not that he actually was.

- **Leeser:** "...we indeed *esteemed* him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."
- **Alter:** "We had *reckoned* him plagued, God-stricken, tormented."
- **Tanakh-JPS:** "We *accounted* him plagued, smitten and afflicted by God."
- **JPS-Tanakh:** "Whereas we did *esteem* him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted."
- **Chabad:** "...we *accounted* him as plagued."
- **Artscroll:** "We had *regarded* him diseased stricken by God."

Yakov: This is one of the passages that can be applied to Jesus and Israel... There is nothing here in this passage about sins. One can spiritualize it to say the biggest illness is sin but that is just one's interpretation.

Answer: Correct, "sin" is not mentioned in this verse, but sin is mentioned in verse 12. Verses 5, 6 and 11 mention "errors"; verse 8, "transgression"; and verse 9, "guilt offering." The idea is well covered in these 6 verses which constitute nearly half of the 15 verses in the Servant passage.

There are three words dealing with wrongdoing in the Tanakh: *chet* (34x), *pesha* (93x), and *avon* (233x). *Pesha* and *avon* appear in verse 5. Understanding the meaning of these words helps to get the sense of the text.

Disease and death are consequences of Adam's sin and the imperfection he passed on to the rest of mankind. As King David wrote, "Look! I was born guilty of error, and my mother conceived me in sin."—Psalm 51:5.

Sickness and sin are closely linked according to the Tanakh.

- **Isaiah 33:24** "And no resident will say: 'I am sick.' The people dwelling in the land will be pardoned for their error."

Dealing with sin and its consequences was an important part of Jesus' ministry. Jesus *carried their sicknesses, and he bore their pains*.

- **Matthew 9:2-8** "...in order for you to know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins—then he said to the paralytic: 'Get up, pick up your bed, and go to your home.' And he got up and went off to his home. At the sight of this the crowds were struck with fear, and they glorified God, who gave such authority to men."
- **Matthew 8:14-17** "Jesus, on coming into Peter's house, saw his mother-in-law lying down and sick with fever. So he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began ministering to him. But after it became evening, people brought him many demon-possessed persons; and he expelled the spirits with a word, and he cured all who were faring badly; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He himself took our sicknesses and carried our diseases.'"
- **Luke 6:18, 19** "Even those troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd were seeking to touch him, because power was going out of him and healing them all."

Upon Jesus' return as King of God's Kingdom, he will apply the benefits of the ransom sacrifice, the blessings of which will greatly surpass all the good he did while on earth.

- **Romans 5:12, 21** "...just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because they had all sinned... so also undeserved kindness might rule as king through righteousness leading to everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Yakov: Christians claim that Jesus bore the illness and suffered for all the people that believe in him. But this passage does not say that one needs to believe in the Servant.

Answer: Right again, Yakov! The passage does not say "one needs to believe in the Servant," and the fact is that Jesus cured some that did not have faith in him. The

narrators in the passage are talking about how they had benefited from the Servant's labors despite their lack of faith: they "accounted him as plagued." There was neither space nor necessity for a laundry list of requirements in a passage of 15 verses. There is sufficient admonition in the book of Leviticus as well as the multiple texts condemning Israel for its sins. (See texts under Isaiah 53:9.) There was no need to waste words. As the ancient Rabbinic saying goes, *hamevin yavin*, (the understanding one will understand).

Considering that the Servant's life is a *guilt offering*, it's understood that God has full discretion *not* to apply the benefits of that sacrifice to any person he deems unworthy, as with any sacrifice under the Law.—Along with the following texts, see also Isaiah 1:11 and Jeremiah 6:20.

- **Genesis 4:4, 5** "While Jehovah looked with favor on Abel and on his offering, he did not look with any favor on Cain and on his offering."
- **Isaiah 66:3** "The one slaughtering the bull is like one striking down a man. The one sacrificing a sheep is like one breaking the neck of a dog. The one offering a gift—like the blood of a pig!... They have chosen their own ways, and they take delight in what is disgusting."

Yakov: For 2000 years Christians have claimed that Israel has suffered because of rejecting Jesus. But I personally feel that they rejected Jesus as he did not align with the messiah that G-d said, and their suffering was for their own sins of not keeping the Torah.

Answer: Yes, we can agree on your first sentence. The claim that Jewish suffering for millennia has been due to rejecting Jesus, is unjustified. In Matthew 27:5, quoted below, the Jews accepted bloodguilt for Jesus' execution 'upon themselves and their children,' meaning *one* generation after their own. Yoma 9b says: "But why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they occupied themselves with Torah, *mitzvot* and acts of kindness? Because baseless hatred [*sinat chinnam*] prevailed. This teaches you that baseless hatred is equal to the three sins of idolatry, illicit relations and murder [which led to the destruction of the First Temple]." "Baseless hatred" would certainly include the execution of Jesus who was innocent of any wrongdoing.

- **Matthew 27:24, 25** "Pilate took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying: 'I am innocent of the blood of this man. You yourselves must see to it.' 25 At that all the people said in answer: '*Let his blood come upon us and upon our children.*'"
 - They accepted any bloodguilt related to Jesus' death, for one generation after their own.
- **Matthew 23:33-38** "'Serpents, offspring of vipers, how will you flee from the judgment of Gehenna? 34 For this reason, I am sending to you prophets and wise men and public instructors. Some of them you will kill and execute on stakes, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, 35 so that there may come upon you all the righteous blood spilled on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachia, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Truly I say to you, all these things will come *upon this generation*. 37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the killer of the prophets and stoner of those sent to her—how often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings! But you did not want it. 38 Look! Your house is abandoned to you."

The second part of your question, "...they rejected Jesus as he did not align with the messiah that G-d said," is a common objection, but historically baseless; as if there was but one messianic idea shared by all Jews in the 1st Century. In *The Concept of the Messiah in Second Temple and Rabbinic Literature*, the Orthodox Jewish professor, Lawrence Schiffman, examines the "various views of Messianism" that existed simultaneously "even within the same strain of Judaism."

https://www.academia.edu/19727390/_The_Concept_of_the_Messiah_in_Second_Temple_and_Rabbinic_Literature_The_New_Testament_and_Judaism_Review_and_Expositor_84_1987_pp_235_246?sm=b

The rabbis backed many messianic pretenders in the First Century, virtually all of whom had aspirations of liberating Israel from Roman domination. Had Jesus received Rabbinic backing, it would have been iron clad proof that he was *not* the Messiah, because the rabbis got it wrong *every* single time. (Chapter 3, *Jesus Did Not Fulfill Jewish Messianic Expectations*, deals with this question in detail.)

On the other hand, it was foretold in Isaiah 53:2, 3 that the Servant would *not* be accepted, "No stately form... nor any splendor... his appearance does not draw us to him... despised and was avoided by men." The phrase, "avoided by men" (*chadal ishim*), gives the idea that no one of influence or authority was backing him. Jesus fit the biblical picture of the Servant, the messiah, and his resurrection put a divine stamp of approval that that is exactly who he was.

- **Acts 5:36-39** "[Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin] 'before these days Theudas rose up, saying he himself was somebody, and a number of men, about 400, joined his party. But he was done away with, and all those who were following him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After him, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the registration, and he drew followers after himself. That man also perished, and all those who were following him were scattered. 38 So under the present circumstances, I say to you, do not meddle with these men, but let them alone. For if this scheme or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. Otherwise, you may even be found fighters against God himself.'"

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:5—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:5: The narrators describe how the Servant suffered and the reasons for it.

NW: "But he was ¹pierced ²for our transgression; he was crushed for our errors. He bore the punishment for our peace, and because of his wounds we were healed."

Chabad: "But he was ¹pained ²because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his wound we were healed."

Yakov: The Christians mistranslate "pierced" instead of "pained" and they changed "because of" to "for," to make this passage fit the theology that Jesus died for peoples' sins. How can the Christian Bible change the word of G-d?

NOTE: Yakov's indignation at the perceived Christian manipulation of Bible texts reflects his appreciation for God's Word. His expression, *changing the word of G-d*, is a near verbatim quote of Jeremiah 23:36. Regrettably, he does not know Hebrew and his exclusive reliance on Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) translations and sources leads him to shortsighted conclusions, not to mention misdirected irritation. It also reveals a fair amount of *confirmation bias*, evident in the many accusations of Christian mistranslations, none of which are justified.

Answer: The accusation is without basis. The question should be: "Why has *Chabad* changed the words of the living God?" (Jeremiah 23:36) "Pierced" is the best translation (or, "wounded"). This can be seen in the comparison of Isaiah 53:5 with Isaiah 51:9 (which uses the same word as that in 53:5). "Pained" may convey the idea of emotional sorrow rather than the physical aggression the passage transmits.

Translation issues:

1. "Pierced/wounded" vs "pained." Chabad's inconsistency reveals the translator's bias.

Jewish translations	Isaiah 53:5 [וְהוּא מְחֻלָּל]	Isaiah 51:9 [חֹלֶלֶת תַּנִּין]
<i>Leeser:</i>	he was wounded	pierced the crocodile
<i>Tanakh-JPS:</i>	he was wounded	pierced the dragon
<i>JPS-Tanakh:</i>	he was wounded	pierced the dragon
<i>Alter:</i>	he was wounded	pierced the beast
<i>Chabad:</i>	he was pained	*slew the sea monster

***Rashi** (on Isaiah 51:9), "slew: Heb. מְחֻלָּל (*meholelet*), an expression of slaying, related to לָחַץ."

Meholal = a death blow denoting a calamity inflicted by violence. The narrator is expressing his dismay at the Servant's suffering and death.

2. "For" vs "because." Judgment call.

- **Leeser:** "...wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities..."
- **Alter:** "...wounded for our crimes, crushed for our transgressions..."

Answer: The Jewish translations remove any basis to the accusation of "Christian manipulation" in the above case. But apart from that, making an issue of word choice here is pointless since other texts in the passage also indicate that the Servant suffers in place of others. Compare the translations below of three different texts.

- **Artscroll:** 53:6 "Hashem *inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all*..."
- **Alter:** 53:8 "...he was cut off... *bearing their blight*..."
- **Tanakh-JPS:** 53:10 "...the LORD chose to crush him... *an offering for guilt*..."

Yakov: This passage says that the Servant was punished because of the sins of the Gentiles. Remember, the Gentiles are speaking from verse 1.

NOTE: In saying, "Remember, the Gentiles are speaking from verse 1," Yakov is stating a supposition, his personal belief, as if it were a fact. By citing something that has yet to be proven as if it were a fact he continually falls into the trap of circular reasoning. I mentioned this to him, but it was water off a duck's back.

Answer: You are confusing commentary with translation. The text says, “*our* iniquities,” not, “the *gentiles*’ iniquities.” Your suggestion follows Rashi’s comment on 53:5, “The chastisement due to the welfare that we [gentile nations] enjoyed, came upon him [the Servant/Israel], for he was chastised so that there be peace for the entire world.” Moreover, the suggestion that Israel’s suffering resulted in peace for the gentiles turns the biblical facts upside down; the gentile nations were punished for being overly cruel in their treatment of Israel. (Compare Jeremiah 30:11; 50:29; 51:24.) No one received peace because of the punishment of the Jews. Furthermore, the idea also contradicts Rashi’s own comment on 53:10 (see below), that the Servant, Israel, “betrayed” God, that is, Israel suffered because of its own sins.

Rashi alludes to the *righteous of Israel* as the Servant in two ways, as those who suffer and as those that prosper. On Isaiah 53:8 he comments: “because of the transgression of my people [the gentiles], this plague came to the *righteous among them* [the Jews].” On 52:13 he says: “My servant, Jacob [i.e.] *the righteous among him*, shall prosper.” The idea has neither biblical or historical support. When the nations persecuted Israel, everyone suffered along with the *righteous of Israel*. The only time that the *righteous of Israel* suffered separately from the rest of the nation was when fellow Israelites persecuted them. (Compare: 1 Kings 19:10; 22:24; 2 Chronicles 24:20, 21; Isaiah 66:5; Jeremiah 37:15.) Also, both the biblical and historical records are replete with accounts of the *unrighteous* of Israel prospering.

“He bore the punishment for *our* peace...” “Peace (*shalom*),” refers to the state of being free from war or disturbance (Judges 4:17; 1 Samuel 7:14; 1 Kings 4:24; 1 Chronicles 15:5; Job 21:9; Ecclesiastes 3:8); and can convey the idea of health, safety, soundness (Genesis 37:14), welfare (Genesis 41:16), friendship (Psalm 41:9), and entirety or completeness (Jeremiah 13:19).” (*Insight on the Scriptures*) As mentioned, to suggest that Israel’s punishment resulted in *peace* for the gentile nations is irreconcilable with Scripture as well as with history.

The narrators must be Israelites who were followers of the Servant; they know what happened to him, understand the reason for it, and his suffering benefited them personally. The kings/nations could not have made these statements since they had not been *told* or *heard* the details of the Servant’s mission.

Yakov: Israel as a chosen nation is supposed to be a blessing to the nations. This happens when they live a life that is in line with the Torah. This kind of life brings blessings to both Israel and the Gentiles. So, verse 5 expresses that the “welfare of the Gentiles depends on the kind of life Israel lives.”

NOTE: At times Yakov clearly lacks a coherence filter for some of his statements, as above, likely because he is so emotionally invested in his point of view.

SOME QUESTIONS:

- Does your statement, “...the welfare of the Gentiles depends on the kind of life Israel lives,” apply throughout the 2500+ years of Israel’s suffering? If not, then from when?
- Are world conditions a reflection of Israel’s poor spiritual state?
- Is Israel’s spiritual state the *cause* of world conditions today (wars, famine, violence, etc)?

- If Israel's punishment means "peace" for the nations, why is the world in such a mess?
- If "the welfare of the Gentiles depends on the kind of life Israel lives," are the gentile nations condemned to be in turmoil until Israel returns to Torah?
- How can Israel "return to Torah" when "Torah" includes Temple sacrifices which are no longer possible? It sounds like a catch-22 situation; perpetual condemnation for both Israel and the rest of humanity.
- According to the Jewish view of Isaiah 53:5, the gentile nations were "healed" because of Israel's wounds. If so, why do you say, "...the welfare of the Gentiles depends on the kind of life Israel lives?"

Yakov: Israel's chastisement, in my view, is to correct the lowest form of sins.

NOTE: Here is another characteristic of Yakov's reasoning; he proposes points of view that lack any discernable basis.

SOME QUESTIONS:

- Why do you feel the Servant "was pierced, crushed, punished and wounded" to correct merely "the *lowest form* of sins?"
- What exactly are the "the lowest form of sins" that were corrected by the Servant's suffering and what is the biblical basis for the classification?
- Saying that 2½ millennia of Jewish suffering only atones for the *lowest form of sins* sounds like killing ants with cannons. So much suffering for so little healing! And, it could be asked, "What healing... where?"

"He bore the punishment... we were healed." For reasons already mentioned, the natural sense of Isaiah 53:5 is to view the speakers as Israelites talking about how the Servant's suffering resulted in their healing. The gentile nations were punished by God, not healed, so they could hardly be the ones speaking.

- **Jeremiah 30:11** "But I will make an extermination among all the *nations* to which I scattered you."

Yakov: Vicarious atonement is not taught in Tanakh. At best we have an animal take the place of the sinner for unintentional sins. In my reasoning, this just tells the person that you lost a valuable animal now be careful and do not make the same mistake again.

NOTE: Sometimes certain phrases or words like *vicarious* get past Yakov. This, along with his personal interpretation of things makes productive conversation slow going.

Answer: Every sacrifice under the Law for guilt or sin etc, was vicarious. All sacrifices were substitute or surrogate sacrifices. Either the animal died to mitigate the guilt of the individual presenting the sacrifice or there was some sort of compensation. In Isaiah 53, the Servant is said to *bear the punishment* of others, and his death as a "guilt offering," is the very *definition* of a vicarious, substitutionary, surrogate sacrifice. (Isaiah 53:5, 8, 10, 12.) Even if the Servant is interpreted as collective Israel, the sacrifice is still vicarious by definition, Israel would be suffering in place of the nations.

- **Definition:** "*Vicarious* comes from the Latin word *vicarius*, which means 'substitute.' As an adjective: suffered or done by one person as a substitute for another... '*vicarious atonement*.'"

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Just as the Servant is pierced in Isaiah 53:5, so Jesus was *pierced*, and later bitterly lamented.

- **Matthew 20:28** “The Son of man came, not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom in exchange for many.”
- **John 19:34** “But one of the soldiers jabbed his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.”
- **John 3:16** “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”
- **Romans 6:23** “For the wages sin pays is death, but the gift God gives is everlasting life by Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- **Acts 2:36, 37** “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you executed on a stake.’
37 Now when they heard this, they were stabbed to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: ‘Men, brothers, what should we do?’”

Isaiah 53:5 is very similar to **Zechariah 12:10**: “...the inhabitants of Jerusalem... will look to the one whom they pierced, and they will wail over him as they would wail over an only son; and they will grieve bitterly over him as they would *grieve over a firstborn son*.”

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:6—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:6: The suffering that the Servant endures, resulting in salvation, was arranged by Jehovah.

NW: “Like sheep we have all wandered about, each has turned his own way, and Jehovah has caused the error of us all to meet up with him.”

Chabad: “We all went astray like sheep, we have turned, each one on his way, and the Lord accepted his prayers for the iniquity of all of us.”

Yakov: How can the Christian Bible *change my G-d’s word*?

NOTE: Here we go again, accusations of Christian falsification of the text without understanding Hebrew and without bothering to look into other Jewish translations (not even *Artscroll*, which Yakov owns) to see if they agree with *Chabad’s* translation. He is quick to condemn Christian translators – wrongly so – while very willing to accept it when Jewish translators distort the text to support their interpretation.

Answer: “Prayers,” (*tfilot*), is not in the Hebrew. Chabad’s translation is designed to align with Rashi’s commentary: “He accepted his *prayers* and was appeased concerning the iniquity of all of us, that He did not destroy His world.” *Chabad* has been manipulative, not Christian translators. Even the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) *Artscroll* got this one right!

Translation issue:

- **Leeser**: “...the Lord let befall him the guilt of us all.”

- **Alter:** "...the LORD brought down upon him the crimes of all of us."
- **Tanakh-JPS:** "...the LORD visited upon him the guilt of all of us."
- **JPS-Tanakh:** "...the LORD hath made to light on him the iniquity of us all."
- **Artscroll:** "Hashem inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all."

"Jehovah has caused..." Once again, the narrators pronounce God's personal name. There is no reason to suppose that the gentiles would pronounce it.

"...Jehovah has caused the error of us all to meet up with him." Just as blood-guiltiness comes *upon* a murderer, sin comes *upon*, or *meets with*, the sinner. (Compare Psalm 40:12.) The narrators understand that "the error of us *all*," the entire Jewish nation, *meets up with*, or *falls upon*, God's Servant.

"Like sheep." After witnessing the Servant's death (53:5), the narrators describe themselves as sheep that had gone astray; being disoriented and lacking direction. The term "sheep" fits the Israelites because they are called God's flock, "the sheep of his pasture." (Psalm 100:3) The term does not fit the nations who are described as beasts. (Daniel 7:1-7, 17) And why would the nations ever refer to themselves as lost sheep?

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

"We all went astray like sheep." Jesus' disciples scattered when he was arrested.

- **Matthew 26:31** "Then Jesus said to them: 'All of you will be stumbled in connection with me on this night, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered about.'"
- **Matthew 26:51, 56** Then they came forward and seized Jesus and took him into custody... Then all the disciples abandoned him and fled.

Yakov.": If this passage was about Jesus, should it not say that his blood saves us? Since the passage says "prayers," "intercession," one can interpret this to say Jesus's death is his prayer or intercession, but that is an interpretation and not what the passage says.

Answer: As stated, neither "*accepted*," or "*prayers*" are in the Hebrew. Rather, "[Jehovah] inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all." Jesus was *inflicted... our crimes were brought down upon him*.

Yakov: This passage could be applied to Jesus, but it applies more to Israel as for the last 3000 years they were afflicted by the nations, and no one was willing to hear them or help them.

Answer: "3000 years?"... including the reigns of David and Solomon? Is this a typo? In any case, the amount of time Israel has suffered is irrelevant in determining the Servant's identity. If this were the *Persecution Olympics* the Jews would win hands down, but it isn't. The main question is whether the passage is talking about an individual or collective Israel. If it is seen that the passage points to the Servant as an individual, then it is Jesus who best fits the description.

- **1 Peter 2:24, 25** "He himself bore our sins in his own body upon the stake, in order that we might be done with sins and live to righteousness. And 'by his stripes you were healed.' 25 For you were like sheep, going astray; but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls."

Under the Law Covenant, atonement was not possible without a sacrifice. The phrase, "...the LORD brought down upon him the crimes of all of us," refers to Jesus' death being accepted by God as a sacrifice in place of imperfect, sinful mankind. By allowing Jesus to bear the punishment of others as a guilt offering, both God's self-sacrificing love, and that of Jesus, are clearly evident.

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:7—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:7-9: This fourth section describes the Servant's suffering, death and burial. The focus is on what the Servant was and what he endured. The narrators continue talking of the Servant's career, how he was viewed, and how his mission ended in tragedy.

NW: **"He was oppressed and he let himself be afflicted, but he would not open his mouth. He was brought like a sheep to the slaughter, like a ewe that is silent before its shearers, and he would not open his mouth."**

Chabad: **"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he would not open his mouth; like a lamb to the slaughter he would be brought, and like a ewe that is mute before her shearers, and he would not open his mouth."**

"...he let himself be afflicted... like a lamb to the slaughter..." The narrators' comments hardly fit the nation of Israel. Historically, Israel never went "...like a lamb to the slaughter." According to historian Will Durant, "No people in history has fought so tenaciously for liberty as the Jews."³ In a speech to the UN (11/27/24), Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, mentioned that since October 7th, Israel has been fighting on 7 fronts, and added, "Far from being lambs led to the slaughter, Israel's soldiers have fought back with incredible courage and heroic sacrifice."

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

"Like a *sheep* to the slaughter." The idea of one sheep in place of many sheep (see verse 6), is a simile for one human life in place of many human lives. Jesus, like a sheep, voluntarily submitted to his trials. Though Jesus could have offered resistance on the final night of his life when they arrested him, he refused to do so. He faced death like a sacrificial lamb because he did not want to do anything that might jeopardize the salvation of mankind.—John 1:29.

- **Matthew 26:52-53** "Jesus said to him: 'Return your sword to its place... 53 Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father to supply me at this moment more than 12 legions of angels? 54 In that case, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must take place this way?'"

"...[he] would not open his mouth."

- **Matthew 27:11-14** "But, while he [Jesus] was being accused by the chief priests and older men, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him: 'Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?' 14 Yet he did not answer him, no, not a word, so that the governor wondered very much."
- **Acts 8:32-35** "Now the passage of Scripture that he was reading aloud was this: 'As a sheep he was brought to the slaughter, and as a lamb that is voiceless

before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth...' 34 the eunuch said to Philip: 'I beg you, about whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about some other man?' 35 Philip... starting with this Scripture, he declared to him the good news about Jesus."

- **1 Peter 2:21-23** "Christ suffered for you... 23 When he was being insulted, he did not insult in return. When he was suffering, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the One who judges righteously."

Yakov: The only point I can think of in regard to him "going like a sheep to the slaughter," is what John's gospel says, that Jesus asks his disciples to take swords but later tells Peter to put it down. It's beyond me why he asks for swords and then says not to use it. Later the Greek text uses this incident to say he was counted as a criminal for it. Not many have followed his path.

Answer: You probably had Luke 22:36, 37 in mind where Jesus quotes from Isaiah 53:12, "...let the one who has a money bag take it, likewise a food pouch, and let the one who has no sword sell his outer garment and buy one. 37 For I tell you that what is written must be accomplished in me, namely, 'He was counted with lawless ones.' For this is being fulfilled concerning me."

I see why you might think the text is saying that Jesus was counted as a criminal because of the swords, but that's not the case. Jesus was preparing his disciples for a change in circumstances because he knew he would soon be executed, and they too would be persecuted. Each of them would need a money purse (no more communal contribution box) and something to defend themselves against wild animals and robbers during nighttime travel. The swords didn't play a role in Jesus' being "counted among the transgressors," because swords were in common usage. (*The Jewish War*, Josephus, III, 42) The reason they were told to take swords was to teach a vital lesson: "...all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52) That is, Christians must not bear arms in rebellion or war. No swords... no lesson. The swords also emphasized that Jesus was not violent, not a threat.

You are correct in saying "not many have followed Jesus' path." In the 2nd Century CE, Roman philosopher Celsus complained about Christians because they wouldn't join the Roman army. That continued to be the case for quite some time, "...no Christian became a soldier; and no soldier, after becoming a Christian, remained in military service. (*The Rise of Christianity*, E. W. Barnes, p. 333) Things changed however, when Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and by the 5th Century *only* Christians were allowed to join the Roman army.

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:8—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:8: The closing portion of the Servant's life.

NW: "Because of ¹restraint and judgment he was taken away; and who will concern himself with the details of his generation? For he was ²cut off from the land of the living; because of the transgression of my people ³he received the stroke [מִפְּשַׁע עַמִּי נָגַע לוֹ]."

Chabad: “From ¹imprisonment and from judgment he is taken, and his generation who shall tell? For he was ²cut off from the land of the living; because of the transgression of my people, a plague befell ³them.”

Artscroll: “Now that he has been ¹released from captivity and judgment, who could have imagined such a generation? For *he had been* ²removed from the land of the living, an affliction upon ³them that was my people’s sin.”

Translation issues:

1. “Restraint, Imprisonment or Released from captivity?”

- **Leeser**: “Through *oppression* and through judicial punishment.”
- **Alter**: “By *oppressive judgement*...”
- **Tanakh-JPS**: “By *oppressive judgement*...”
- **JPS-Tanakh**: “By *oppression* and judgement...”

As seen in the above translations, the Hebrew term “meotzer” (מַעֲצֵר) indicates some sort of violent constraint, oppression, persecutorial treatment. (Compare Psalm 107:39.) *Chabad*’s translation employs the specific term, “imprisonment,” even though the means of “restraint/oppression” is not specified in the text. This is like saying that so-and-so died of a heart attack even though no cause of death was mentioned in the original report. *Chabad* has chosen “imprisonment,” in favor of the narrative that the Servant is Israel and the term fits the fate of many Jews who were wrongfully *imprisoned* over the centuries. *Artscroll*’s, “released from captivity,” is so bad it doesn’t warrant a comment.

2. “Cut off or Removed?” “Cut off” is correct. *Artscroll*’s mistranslation is egregious, manipulated to support the Jewish view that Israel, the Servant, returns to its homeland after having been exiled (reflected in *Artscroll*’s footnote). The word “removed” makes it possible to dodge questions about why the text says the Servant is “cut off,” killed, but Israel has survived.

Both *Artscroll* and *Chabad* play fast and loose with this text in different ways.—
Jeremiah 23:36.

3. “He vs them”.....

Yakov: Here the Christian Bible changes the word “them” to “he” to match Jesus’ story.

NOTE: Yakov’s source is his Hebrew/English interlinear Bible, but the objection is very common on outreach websites.

Answer: Judgment call. The word “lamo” is generally plural but can be translated as singular according to the context. (Compare Isaiah 44:15.)

- **Leeser**: “...*he* was cut away... for the transgressions of my people the plague was laid on him...”
- **Alter**: “...*he* was cut off... bearing their blight.”
- **Tanakh-JPS**: “...*he* was cut off... through the sin of my people, who deserved the judgement.”
- **JPS-Tanakh**: “...*he* was cut off... For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due.”

NOTE: Yakov wanted me to tell him the basis for the Jewish versions when we spoke about it on WhatsApp. Apart from not being privy to the reasons why those translators

made certain decisions, which you would think was obvious, I felt the quotes from the Jewish Bibles proved the point sufficiently and suggested he Google it. He replied, “When I asked you a specific question and insist on a response, you give me inputs from... Chosen People Ministries [at least your responses appear there case in point Lamo].” In fact I don’t know this website, but it seems Yakov had to search Christian sources to find what he was looking for because no Jewish sites provided the information. Now, that’s telling!

“...who will concern himself with the details of his generation?” The Servant’s followers express their despair. They had witnessed his arrest, and execution without regard for justice, and now it looked like it was all in vain. He died as a criminal and all he did would be forgotten.

“...cut off from the land of the living; because of the transgression of *my people* he received *the stroke*.”

Yakov: The phrase “land of the Living” comes up several times in Tanakh and it *always* refers to being exiled out of Israel and not being killed.

NOTE: His opinion on the phrase, “land of the living,” is based on Rashi: “...he [the Servant] was cut off and exiled from the land of the living, that is the land of Israel.” Had he checked a concordance to see how the expression “land of the living” is used in different contexts, or even consulted his *Artscroll* translation, he would have saved himself the trouble of making the above statement.

Answer: The term the “land of the living” may or may not refer to exile.

- **Jeremiah 11:19**, “I am like a choice sheep led to the slaughter; I did not know that they devised schemes against me: ‘Let us destroy [him by placing] tree-poison in his food and *cut him off from the land of the living*, so that his name will not be remembered anymore.’”
- ***Artscroll’s* footnote** on the text says: “Jeremiah’s townspeople plotted to kill him for his constant rebukes and prophecies of doom.”—See also, Isaiah 38:11 and *Artscroll’s* footnote on the verse.

The Servant was killed, not exiled. Other expressions in the verse make this abundantly clear; “cut off... received the stroke.” This view is supported by chapter 53 in its entirety: *pierced... crushed* (53:5)... like a sheep to the *slaughter* (53:7)... a *burial place*... in his *death* (53:9)... present *his soul as a guilt offering* (53:10)... he *poured out his soul even to death*. (53:12) Only a photograph could be more conclusive! (Hamevin yavin...)

“...the transgression of *my people*.” The narrator confesses that “my people,” the Jewish nation, had transgressed God’s law. He is speaking in the same vein as Daniel the prophet, “While I was... confessing... the sin of *my people*...” (Daniel 9:20, compare also Isaiah 57:14.) In contrast, the kings/nations – of different nationalities, races, languages and religions – never referred to themselves as “my people.”

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov: Was Jesus imprisoned?

Answer: Covered above.

“Because of restraint and of judgment he was taken away.” Jesus, like the Servant, did not receive the “judgment” of a fair trial; an unbiased hearing and ruling. The religious leaders broke their own rules. According to tradition, the Sanhedrin had to try a capital case in the hall of hewn stones in the Temple precincts, not in the high priest’s house. A capital case had to be held during the day, not after sundown, and a guilty verdict had to be announced the day following the conclusion of the hearing. No trials could be held on the eve of a Sabbath or a festival. All these rules were ignored in the case of Jesus’ trial. (See Matthew 26:57-68 below.) More importantly, they violated God’s Law in their handling of the case: there was bribery (Deuteronomy 16:19; Luke 22:2-6), false witnesses (Exodus 20:16; Mark 14:55, 56), and a murderer, Barabbas, was released at the instigation of the priests. (Numbers 35:31-34; Luke 23:16-25) There was no “judgment,” in the sense of a fair trial and impartial ruling.

- **Matthew 26:57-68** “Those who took Jesus into custody led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together... 59 Now the chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin were looking for false testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death. 60 But they found none, although many false witnesses came forward. Later two came forward 61 and said: ‘This man said, I am able to throw down the temple of God and build it up in three days’... 63 But Jesus kept silent. So the high priest said to him: ‘I put you under oath by the living God to tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God!’ 64 Jesus said to him: ‘You yourself said it. But I say to you: From now on you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ 65 Then the high priest ripped his outer garments, saying: ‘He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? See! Now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What is your opinion?’ They answered: ‘He deserves to die.’ 67 Then they spat in his face and hit him with their fists. Others slapped him on the face, 68 saying: ‘Prophecy to us, you Christ. Who struck you?’”

“Because of the transgression of my people he had the stroke.” Israel was subject to the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 because they had sinned against God (without relation to their treatment of Jesus). Jesus became a *curse* in their place when he was executed on Passover day of 33 CE, outside of Jerusalem.

- **Galatians 3:13** “Christ purchased us, releasing us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse instead of us, because it is written [in Deuteronomy 21:23]: Accursed is every man hung upon a stake.”

“...and who will concern himself even with his generation?” The authorities had no interest in the details of Jesus’ background, who he really was. The Sanhedrin did not attempt to get the facts of his background to see if he really fulfilled the scriptural description of the Messiah. The entire court accused him of blasphemy when he answered the high priest regarding his identity. (Matthew 26:59-68) Pilate yielded to the mob and sentenced Jesus to death.—Matthew 27:24-26; Luke 23:6-25; John 18:33-19:16.

“For he was severed/cut off from the land of the living.” Jesus, the Messiah, was a little over 33 when he was “cut off,” executed.

- **Daniel 9:24-27** “And after the sixty-two weeks *Messiah will be cut off*...and at the half of the week he will cause sacrifice and gift offering to cease.”

—Isaiah 53:9—

NW: “And he was given a burial place with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, although he had done no wrong and there was no deception in his mouth.”

Chabad: “And he gave his grave to the wicked, and to the wealthy with his kinds of death because he committed no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

Artscroll: “He submitted himself to his grave like wicked men; and the wealthy [submitted] to his executions, for committing no crime and with no deceit in his mouth.”

A comment on translation: Both *Chabad's* and *Artscroll's* translation make the text conform to a specific Rabbinic commentary, but neither makes much sense. *Chabad's* is made to fit Rashi (see commentary in Chabad website) and *Artscroll* is structured to fit Radak (see the footnote in *Artscroll's* translation). They honor the rabbis more than the author of the Bible. (Jeremiah 23:36) This attitude has a lot of history, Jesus mentioned it (quoting Isaiah 29:13).

- **Matthew 15:6-9** “So you have made the word of God invalid because of your tradition.”

Compare *Chabad's* and *Artscroll's* translations with the following:

- **Alter:** “And his grave was put with the wicked, and with evildoers...”
- **Tanakh-JPS:** “And his grave was set among the wicked, and with the rich...”
- **JPS-Tanakh:** “And they made his grave with the wicked, And with the rich his tomb...”
- **Leeser:** “And he let his grave be made with the wicked, and with the godless rich...”

Yakov: The Hebrew reads “*kinds of death*” and *not* death. This has been changed to “death” so it can apply to one person, that is Jesus.

Answer: The Hebrew word “motav [מֹתָבִין],” is literally, “deaths.” The plural form of the noun indicates a particularly excruciating death. Neither “*kinds of*,” nor “*executions*,” are in the text. Hebrew singular nouns may have a plural ending, grammatically it's called pluralis exelente. Some examples: panim (face), mayim (water), shamayim (sky/heaven), chayyim (life), Elohim (God).

Translation issue: “*kinds of death vs death*.”

- **Leeser:** “...with the godless rich at his *death*...”
- **Alter:** “...and with evildoers his *death*.”
- **Tanakh-JPS:** “...and with the rich in his *death*.”

The above translations have “death” because they see the plural as describing the death of an individual. Translators generally have little difficulty in identifying such cases.

The table shows the various ways *Artscroll* and *Chabad* translate “deaths” in Jeremiah 16:4 and Ezekiel 28:8, 10.

בְּמָתָיו - DEATHS	ARTSCROLL	CHABAD
Jeremiah 16:4	"... <i>die</i> as victims of diseases..."	" <i>Deaths</i> of sicknesses shall they die...."
Ezekiel 28:8	"...die the <i>death</i> of the slain..."	"...you will die the <i>deaths</i> of those who are slain..."
Ezekiel 28:10	"...die the <i>death</i> of the uncircumcised..."	"The <i>deaths</i> of the uncircumcised you will die..."

Chabad's translation is notably inconsistent. It adds "kinds of" to the word "death" in Isaiah 53:9, but "deaths" in the three texts in the table. *Chabad* also exploits the plural in Isaiah 53:9 to support Rashi's explanation: "...to the will of the ruler he [Israel] subjected himself to *all kinds of death* that he decreed upon him."

Artscroll's translation of "executions," in 53:9, but "death" in the three texts in the table, is equally inconsistent. Not only is "executions," not in the Hebrew, *execution* is just one possible cause of death out of many. Here again, a noun is translated as if it were specific but without any justification in the Hebrew. This is commentary, not translation. (And don't get me started on the word, "submitted.")

Yakov: You pick Artscroll issue with Executions and spend time talking and talking when you can see that it is the perfect translation - Jews were executed they did not just fall down and die or die of heart diseases, Execution[S] is plural and perfectly aligns with death[S]... I come with the view that the passages are about different kinds of deaths of many people as I come with the view that the passages are about Israel. You cannot say since Artscroll has a different word I am wrong.

Me: I still feel that you tend to excuse the Jewish commentaries and tendentious translations while being much harsher with the Christian ones... If you're OK with the substitution of "executions" for "deaths," then so be it. But it reveals a double standard. That's how I see it in any case.

NOTE: Yakov is quite content with *Chabad's* "*kinds of death*," and *Artscroll's* "executions" even though these terms are not in the Hebrew. At the same time he condemns Christian translations because they have, "'death' so it can apply to one person, that is Jesus," even though Jewish translations also support the Christian translations. He seems to be saying, "Falsifying the translation is okay as long as it supports *my* idea." Perhaps the final sentence speaks the loudest: "You cannot say... I am wrong."

"And he was given a burial place with the wicked, and with the rich... although he had done do wrong." One can feel the narrators' consternation at the travesty of justice suffered by the Servant, as well as the irony of the circumstances of his burial.

Yakov: He also says they were willing to die rather than deny their G-d.

NOTE: Yakov is quoting Rabbinic commentary as if it were Scripture.

Answer: The Tanakh does not say, "they were willing to die rather than deny their G-d," but Radak's comment does: *Artscroll's* footnote: "Ordinary Jews chose to die like common criminals, rather than renounce their faith." The text actually says that the Servant did nothing wrong and was never deceptive. As the *Encyclopedia Judaica*

notes: “The real Israel is sinful and the Servant [in Isaiah 53], free of sin.” Since Israel was condemned by God for gross moral behavior and apostasy, it is a non-starter as a candidate to be the Servant. (Compare Isaiah 43:22, 24; 50:1.)

“...he had done no wrong... no deception in his mouth.” The description does not fit Israel.

- **Isaiah 66:3** “The one slaughtering the bull is like one striking down a man. The one sacrificing a sheep is like one breaking the neck of a dog. The one offering a gift—like the blood of a pig! The one presenting a memorial offering of frankincense is like one saying a blessing with magical words. They have chosen their own ways, and they take delight in what is disgusting.”
- **Micah 3:11, 12** “Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets practice divination for money. And yet they lean on Jehovah, saying: ‘Is not Jehovah with us? No calamity will come upon us.’ 12 So because of you, Zion will be plowed up as a field, Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins, the mountain of the House will become like high places in a forest.”
- **Zephaniah 3:1-4** “Woe to her that is rebelling and polluting herself, the oppressive city! 2 She did not listen to a voice; she did not accept discipline. In Jehovah she did not trust. To her God she did not draw near. 3 Her princes in the midst of her were roaring lions. Her judges were evening wolves that did not gnaw [bones] till the morning. 4 Her prophets were insolent, were men of treachery. Her priests themselves profaned what was holy; they did violence to [the] law.”
- **Malachi 3:5** “‘I will come near to you for judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who take false oaths, against those who defraud the hired worker, the widow, and the fatherless child, and against those who refuse to help the foreigner. These have not feared me,’ says Jehovah of armies.”

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

“...a burial place with the wicked ones and the rich.”

Yakov: Israel was killed in the gentile nations of Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Africa and thrown into pits and buried like criminals. Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea who was considered a righteous person who was awaiting the messiah.

Answer: As you note, Jews were slaughtered in many nations and thousands of them without any burial, let alone being laid to rest in the tomb of someone rich. Then too, *individual* Jews were killed but *Israel* was not. This is why Jesus fits the description of the Servant’s death and burial, and Israel doesn’t, not even close.

Yakov: Was Jesus not crucified with the wicked and buried in the grave of the righteous Joseph of Arimathea?

Answer: Yes, Jesus was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s grave. His body would have ended up in a common grave for executed criminals, according to Roman practice, if Joseph of Arimathea had not requested it. The text could be understood as, “They assigned him a grave with criminals, but *after* his death, with a rich man.” This is very much in harmony with the *Tanakh-JPS*, “...his grave was *set* among the wicked, and with the rich in his death.”

The enigmatic statement of the narrators was left as a conundrum until the time of the prophecy's fulfillment.

- **John 19:18, 30** "There they nailed him to the stake alongside two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle... Jesus said: 'It has been accomplished!' and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit."
- **Matthew 27:57-60** "Now... a rich man of Arimathea came, named Joseph... 58 approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded that it be given to him. 59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it up in clean, fine linen, 60 and laid it in his new tomb, which he had quarried in the rock."

For those who rejected Jesus as an imposter, his being laid in the tomb of a rich member of the Sanhedrin would not change their point of view. As far as they were concerned, he was a criminal who died among criminals and, in their minds, that's where he was buried. On the other hand, Jesus' honorable burial and the respectful treatment his corpse received was because he was such a remarkable individual who "had done no wrong and there was no deception in his mouth."

A couple points here: First, your question highlights the trustworthiness of the gospel accounts, otherwise what might be seen as a discrepancy wouldn't be there. Also, the question you ask throws shade on the striking similarity of Isaiah 53:9 and the gospel accounts. If someone is looking for a reason to reject something they can always find one. As Jesus said: "With whom will I compare this generation? It is like young children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to their playmates, saying: 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance; we wailed, but you did not beat yourselves in grief.' Likewise, John came neither eating nor drinking, but people say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of man did come eating and drinking, but people say, 'Look! A man who is a glutton and is given to drinking wine, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"—Matthew 11:16-19.

- **John 19:30** "When he had received the sour wine, Jesus said: 'It has been accomplished!' and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit."

Satan was permitted to *crush Jesus' heel* (causing his death) in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, though "he had done no violence and there was no deception in his mouth." The *Palestinian Targum* applies the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 to "the day of King Messiah."

"...done no violence... no deception in his mouth." This only fits Jesus. It does not fit Israel or any of the many other Jewish messiahs, many of whom commanded militias.

- **1 Peter 2:21-25** "Christ suffered for you, leaving a model for you to follow his steps closely. 22 He committed no sin, nor was deception found in his mouth. 23 When he was being insulted, he did not insult in return. When he was suffering, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the One who judges righteously. 24 He himself bore our sins in his own body on the stake, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. And 'by his wounds you were healed.' 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls."

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:10—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:10: This final section expands on the background of the Servant's fate (as in Isaiah 53:6), and verses 11 and 12 focus on the Servant's glorification (as in 52:13-15).

NW: "But it was Jehovah's will to crush him, and he let him become sick. If ¹you will present his life as a guilt offering, he will see his offspring, he will prolong his days, and through him the delight of Jehovah will have success [םִשְׁחָתִים יִשְׁמַח ׁשְׁפָּן]."

Chabad: "And the Lord wished to crush him, He made him ill; if ¹his soul makes itself restitution, he shall see children, he shall prolong his days, and God's purpose shall prosper in his hand."

Artscroll: "HASHEM desired to oppress him and He afflicted him; ²if his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring and live long days and the desire of HASHEM would succeed in his hand."

"...it was Jehovah's will to crush him... if you/he will present his life as a guilt offering..." The narrators comprehend that the Servant had accomplished God's will, including giving his life as a *guilt offering*. From their perspective however, the benefits of the Servant's sacrifice had not yet been applied. This is seen in the use of the subordinating conjunction, "if."

Translation issues:

1. "**you**" vs "**his**." Judgment call, both translations are correct. The Hebrew is ambiguous and allows for understanding "you," in reference to God who accepts the guilt offering, or "his," referring to the Servant who presents the guilt offering. Regardless of how it is translated, there is no deception on either side.

Some translations, like *NW* above, translate "you," referring to God, since sacrifices were offered to him, and he determined if a sacrifice met the criteria for forgiving one's guilt. Others translate "his/he/himself," referring to the Servant who presents himself as the guilt offering. It's unlikely that the text refers to the individual who accepts the sacrifice of the Servant on his own behalf.

Yakov: The *New International Version* has changed this to "the LORD has made his life a sin offering."

Answer: The 2011 version of *NIV* says: "...the LORD makes his life an *offering for sin*..." not a "sin offering." Technically, "guilt offering" is an "offering for sin," but I'm with you on this one, why not just translate the biblical term? I can't say for sure why they added the word "LORD," but *perhaps* it was to clarify that God is the one who sets the guilt offering. If so, it's like *Chabad* adding "*kinds of*" to the word "death(s)," but the *NIV* is much less interpretive than *Chabad*.

A lot of Christian translations are in line with *Chabad*; here's a sample:

- **NASB:** "If *He* renders Himself as a guilt offering..."
- **YLT:** "If *his* soul doth make an offering for guilt..."
- **AMP:** "If *He* would give Himself as a guilt offering..."

2. *Artscroll's* translation, "...if his soul would acknowledge guilt..." is structured to reflect Rashi, as if the Servant had sinned and needed to repent "just like Israel has sinned and needs to repent."

The following Jewish translations place unbiased translation above Rabbinic commentary.

- **Alter:** "...would he lay down a guilt offering..."
- **Tanakh-JPS:** "If he made himself an offering for guilt..."
- **Leeser:** "...when now his soul hath brought the trespass-offering..."

Yakov: The passage is saying that, "If he *repents from his sins*, he will see"

Answer: The text does not say, "If he repents from his sins...", nor does it allude to, hint at, or infer that the Servant has sinned and needs to repent. The idea that the Servant has sinned comes from Rashi's comment on Isaiah 53:8: "I [God] will see, if *his soul will be given* and delivered with My holiness to return it to Me *as restitution for all that he betrayed Me*." However, Rashi contradicts the immediate context; verse 8 says the Servant was "...cut off... because of the transgression of my people..." and verse 9 says, "...he committed *no violence*, and there was *no deceit* in his mouth." The Jewish view, based on Rashi and the translations his commentary has spawned, make the Tanakh contradict itself.

The Orthodox interpretation gets confusing at this point in view of Rashi's other comments about "the Servant/Israel." I've inserted [Servant/Israel] in Rashi's comments for clarity.

- **Isaiah 53:5** "...he [the Servant/Israel] was chastised so that there be peace for the entire world..."
- **Isaiah 53:9** "He [the Servant/Israel]... did not wish to agree to denial [of the Torah] to commit evil and to rob like all the heathens... there was no deceit in his mouth: to accept idolatry."
- **Isaiah 53:11** "'From the toil of his soul,' he [the Servant/Israel] would eat and be satisfied, and he would not rob and plunder... My servant [Israel] would judge justly all those who came to litigate before him."
- **Isaiah 53:12** "He [the Servant/Israel] suffered torments as if he had sinned and transgressed, and this is because of others."

Rashi's comments on the above texts fit the Orthodox interpretation of the Servant as the "righteous of Israel," but contradict his comment that the Servant needs to repent. It begs the question why the *righteous of Israel* (the Servant) should repent; the Servant is chastised for the sake of world peace, has never denied the Torah, never committed idolatry, never stolen, cheated, or transgressed. And yet, he must make restitution "for *all* that he [the *righteous of Israel*] *betrayed*" God? Perhaps it is alleged that here the phrase "all that he betrayed Me," refers to Israel in general. If so, then what happens to the explanation that the Servant is the "righteous of Israel?" Trying to have it both ways makes them wrong twice.

The phrase, "all that he betrayed Me," complements the basic tenet of Jewish theology that 'Israel sinned and must repent.' Rashi: "[God] wished to crush him [the Servant, Israel] and to cause him to repent." In his article, *Isaiah 53 – The Suffering Servant*, Marshall Roth follows Rashi: "God desired to oppress the Jewish people... to inspire them to return to Torah observance." The idea is at odds with the entire context and

message of Isaiah 53. (And do not overlook the word “inspire” to describe the effect of millenniums of suffering on the Jewish psyche.)

“...**Jehovah’s will to crush him...**” God desired the Servant’s life to serve as a guilt offering for his people. To achieve his objective, the Servant’s integrity needed to be proven under test.

Once again, the narrators pronounce God’s personal name, something the gentiles would not do, especially in the suggested Messianic Age scenario.

“**If you will present...**” The exaltation of the Servant is spoken of as something that still needs to be accomplished. Their perspective is prior to the exaltation of the Servant.

QUESTION: Viewing Israel as the Servant, the text says, “***If*** you will...,” which leaves the possibility open that Israel may not repent. What happens if Israel never repents? Would that affect the nations? And, if so, how?

“...**set his soul as a guilt offering...**” The Servant’s death is sacrificial, a *guilt offering*. This means that his soul, his life, is compensatory, it corresponds or covers the sins of others and allows them to recover a good standing with God.

Rashi: “This word אָשָׁם (*asham*) is an expression of ransom that one gives to the one against [whom] he sinned... to free from faults, similar to the matter mentioned in the episode of the Philistines (1 Samuel 6:3), ‘Do not send it away empty, but you shall send back with it a guilt offering [אָשָׁם].’”

COMMENT: The Servant’s sacrifice is vicarious, a substitute sacrifice, regardless of whether the Servant is thought to be Israel or an individual. According to the Law, the guilt offering was basically a compensatory payment made to God via the priest. The idea of compensatory payment to cover guilt (in the sense of debt) was unique to the guilt offering. (Compare Leviticus 5:15.)

“**He will see his offspring.**” *Alter* comments: “It is also puzzling that after the Servant has been reported dead and buried, and a *surrogate* for Israel’s sins, this conditional possibility of a long and happy life should be offered.” When the Servant is understood to be an individual, then the passage is clear, it must be alluding to the resurrection of the Servant after his death as a guilt offering.

COMMENT: *Alter* uses the expression, “*surrogate* for Israel’s sins.” Synonyms for surrogate: substitute, replacement, proxy, stand in. In other words, a surrogate sacrifice for Israel’s sins is a vicarious sacrifice.

SOME QUESTIONS:

- If the nations/kings are said to be the narrators in this verse, how is it they know a technical term like “guilt offering,” and use it with precision?
- Whose soul is being *crushed* and why?
- Is the one being crushed, innocent or guilty?

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

“Set his soul as a guilt offering.” God “set his soul as a *guilt offering*,” meaning Jesus’ death was sacrificial. (Hebrews 9:24-10:14) “Guilt offering” is the perfect term to describe Jesus’ sacrifice because it was the only sacrifice that was compensatory. Jesus’ perfect human life was a “guilt offering” given to *compensate* or correspond to the life of imperfect repentant mankind.

- **1 Timothy 2:6** “[Jesus] gave himself a *corresponding* ransom for all.”—*NW*.
- **1 Corinthians 15:45** “The first man Adam became a living person. The last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit.”

After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven with the value of his human life which he presented to God as a guilt offering on behalf of Israel and all mankind.

- **Hebrews 9:24-10:12** “For Christ... [entered] into heaven itself, so that he now appears before God on our behalf... 26 to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself... 28 to bear the sins of many... 10:4 for it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take sins away... 10 By this [God’s] ‘will’ we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.... 12 [he] offered one sacrifice for sins for all time and sat down at the right hand of God.”

Yakov: Jesus had no option so the “If” does not apply, he HAD to die according to the Christian Bible.

Answer: As above, “*If you*,” may refer to God setting/accepting Jesus’ life as a guilt offering, in which case your question about Jesus is not relevant. On the other hand, even though Jesus’ death was necessary to save humanity, he never forfeited his free will. He never acted under compulsion.

- **John 10:17, 18** “This is why the Father loves me, because I surrender my life... 18 No man takes it away from me, but I surrender it of my own initiative. I have authority to surrender it, and I have authority to receive it again.”

“Through him the delight of Jehovah will have success.” The verse expresses confidence that Jesus would use his freewill to fulfill God’s will, which included the salvation of humanity. Jesus’ sacrifice laid the foundation for the realization of God’s purpose and blessings for mankind.

“...He will see offspring/seed [Hebrew “zerah”]...” In order to “see offspring,” Jesus was resurrected.

- **Revelation 1:18** “I became dead, but look! I am living forever and ever.”

Jesus *prolongs his days* by becoming the “Eternal Father” of redeemed mankind.

- **Isaiah 9:6** “For a child has been born to us, A son has been given to us; and the rulership will rest on his shoulder. His name will be called... *Eternal Father*, Prince of Peace.”

Jesus takes the place of Adam as the father of the human race, and he sees *seed* by resurrecting thousands of millions. The resurrected ones become Jesus’ “offspring/seed,” because he gives them life.

- **Psalms 45:16** “In place of your forefathers there will come to be your sons, whom you will appoint as princes in all the earth.”

Jesus also sees *seed* in the sense that some of “Abraham’s *seed*” will reign with him as “kings and priests” in God’s kingdom.

NOTE: The Hebrew word “zerah” is used in Genesis 3:15 regarding the “seed of the woman,” who was prophesied to destroy Satan, and it is the same word used in God’s promise to Abraham, “...by means of your *seed* all nations will bless themselves.” (Genesis 22:18) Paul identifies Jesus as the “seed” in Galatians 3:16, and then says, “if you belong to Christ, you are really Abraham’s offspring [seed], heirs with reference to a promise.”—Galatians 3:29.

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:11—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:11: At this point, the passage comes full circle to where it began in 52:13-15, with the exaltation of Servant in view as a future event. God is the narrator, he acknowledges the Servant as his own, calling him “my servant,” and mentions what the Servant’s trials accomplished.

NW: “Because of his anguish, he will see and be satisfied. By means of his knowledge the righteous one, my servant, will bring a righteous standing to many people, and their errors he will bear.”

Chabad: “From the toil of his soul he would see, he would be satisfied; with his knowledge My servant would vindicate the just for many, and their iniquities he would bear.”

SOME QUESTIONS:

- What does *Chabad’s* translation “vindicate the just for many,” mean?
- Who are the *just* and how are they *vindicated* for “many?”

“Because of *his* anguish...” Referring to the troubles the Servant experienced.

“...he will see and be satisfied.” God promises that despite the high price the Servant paid, the results of his mission would satisfy him.

Yakov: This passage is clearly saying that the Servant’s *knowledge of the Torah* will bring a lot of people to the ONE TRUE G-d of the universe.

Answer: The *Torah* is not mentioned in the text, though it is reasonable to assume that it would be part of the Servant’s *knowledge*. However, the suggestion is especially inappropriate if applied to Israel. The Jerusalem Post reports that Israel is one of the least religious countries in the world: “65%... are either not religious or convinced atheists, compared to just 30% who say that they are religious.” Israel has not reversed the rise of atheism worldwide.⁴

“By means of his *knowledge*...” The Hebrew word for knowledge — תָּוָר — is a reminder of the Servant’s intelligence. (Compare Isaiah 52:13.) The Servant’s *knowledge* would include his personal knowledge; knowing God’s will for him, the insight gained in dealing successfully with tests of faith to bring a righteous standing to “many,” and, of course, Torah, though not stated, may be understood as inferred.

“...he will see...” Here, the passage returns to where it began in 52:13-15, with the *future* exaltation of God’s Servant in view.

“...their errors he will bear.” The Servant *bears* errors by giving his life as a guilt offering in atonement for the transgressions of others.

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov-1. Was it Jesus’ knowledge or blood that saves others? 2. How can this apply to Jesus? It is the blood of Jesus that saves sinners, right?

Answer 1-2: Jesus’ “knowledge” would include what he learned by being obedient under severe test, something he hadn’t experienced in his prehuman existence. By being tested even to death, he was able to provide the atoning sacrifice through which many might attain righteousness. (Compare the messianic reference in Isaiah 11:2, “the spirit of knowledge” descends on the *sprout* of Jesse. Also, Zechariah 3:8, 9; and 6:12, 13.)

- **Hebrews 5:8** Although he was a son, he *learned* obedience from the things he suffered.

“Because of the trouble of his soul he will see, he will be *satisfied*.” By his integrity, Jesus provided a powerful reply to Satan who had taunted God. (Proverbs 27:11) His last words, “It has been accomplished,” show he was “satisfied” with the results of his mission.—John 19:30.

“...a righteous standing to many...” Jesus’ sacrifice provided the legal basis on which God could forgive transgressions and grant a righteous standing to many who had inherited imperfection and condemnation from mankind’s father, Adam.

- **Romans 3:26** “This was to demonstrate his [God’s] own righteousness in this present season, so that he might be righteous even when declaring righteous the man who has faith in Jesus.”
- **Romans 5:12** “That is why, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because they had all sinned.”
- **Romans 5:19** “For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were constituted sinners, likewise also through the obedience of the one person many will be constituted righteous.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** “The one who did not know sin he made to be sin for us, that we might become God’s righteousness by means of him.”

Under Jesus as King of God’s Kingdom, the dead will be resurrected and redeemed mankind will be lifted to perfection and eternal life.—Isaiah 9:6.

- **Revelation 20:4-6, 11-13** “And I saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge... And they came to life and ruled as kings with the Christ for 1,000 years... 6 they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and they will rule as kings with him... 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne... 13 and they were judged individually according to their deeds.”

“...their errors he himself will bear.” As God’s Servant, Jesus bore the penalty for mankind’s errors and was thus able to relieve those who accept the provision of the ransom sacrifice of condemnation.

- **1 Peter 2:24** “He himself bore our sins in his own body upon the stake, in order that we might be done with sins and live to righteousness. And ‘by his stripes you were healed [Isaiah 53:5].”

Jesus will accomplish much more as King of God’s Kingdom than what he was able to do while on earth. Under his rule, mankind will experience the full effects of the ransom sacrifice; everlasting life and freedom from sickness and death.

- **Revelation 21:3, 4** “Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his people... 4 And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”

∞ ∞ ∞

—Isaiah 53:12—

INTRODUCTION TO 53:12: God, as narrator, speaks of the Servant’s reward and the reason for it.

NW: “For that reason I will assign him a portion among the many, and he will apportion the spoil with the mighty, because he poured out his life even to death and was counted among the transgressors; he carried the sin of many people, and he interceded for the transgressors.”

Chabad: “Therefore, I will allot him a portion in public, and with the strong he shall share plunder, because he poured out his soul to death, and with transgressors he was counted; and he bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.’

Translation issue:

- **Tanakh-JPS:** “...give him the many as his portion...”
- **Alter:** “...shares among the many...”
- **Leeser:** “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the many...”

Yakov: All this passage is talking about is how G-d will elevate this Servant, so he is above the Gentiles.

Answer: There’s a bit more to the text than your comment suggests. God says he will personally reward Servant and that others would benefit as well. God views his Servant as a conquering warrior who “apportions the spoil with the mighty,” due to the courageous way he carried out his commission.

“...a portion among the many...” This is a biblical phrase relating to the privilege of conquerors. (Compare Psalm 68:12; Isaiah 8:4; 9:3; Zechariah 14:1.) God rewards the Servant for his faithfulness, integrity, and valor in all the trials he faced.

QUESTION: Let’s run with the idea that Israel, as the Servant, repents and returns to Torah *tomorrow*. Why should Israel be *rewarded* and *exalted* after more than 2500 years of sinning against God? Does the picture of a conquering hero fit Israel? Of course, this is assuming that Israel repents sometime soon, which may not be the case the way things look now.

Yakov: He also says that this Servant bore the sins [hatred, exploitation, murder] of others.

Answer: This is true of the Servant viewed as an individual.

“...he bore the sin of many... interceded for the transgressors.” This refers to the Servant giving his life as a guilt offering on behalf of others. (Compare Isaiah 53:10.) He submitted to death as a convicted criminal in order to carry “the sin of many people.” The next phrase, “interceded for the transgressors,” rounds out the thought: The *guilt offering* results in *intercession*; these are two aspects of a single act.

“...he poured out his soul to death.” The Servant could not become a surrogate sacrifice for others without giving up his life. For this reason the Servant “bore our pains” (vs 4), went like a “sheep to the slaughter” (vs 7), gave his life as a “guilt offering” (vs 10), and “...poured out his soul to death.” To say the Servant is collective Israel is forcing an interpretation onto an unwilling context while closing a blind eye to the terminology and vivid imagery of other passages.

Rashi says, “Through his [the Servant’s] sufferings, for good came to the world through him.” My guess is that most Jews today, if they believe at all that “good came to the world” through Jewish suffering, would be hard pressed to agree that the “good” has been commensurate in any way with the amount of suffering the Jewish people have endured.

“...he will apportion the spoil with the mighty...” God says that the Servant will share “the spoil” with others who fought the same kind of warfare on earth that he did. (Compare 1 Samuel 30:24, 25 and Psalm 110:3.) If the Servant is viewed as an individual, it must refer to his being resurrected. The *Jewish Study Bible*, says in its footnote, “Either he [the servant] is saved from a fate like death, or he is actually described as being resurrected.” (The *JSB* conjectures that such a resurrection is “probably” a metaphor for Israel’s eventual renewal.)

JESUS FITS THE DESCRIPTION

Yakov: This is one of the passages that can be applied to Jesus and Israel.

Answer: The expression, “poured out his soul,” only fits Jesus. Simply stated, the Servant dies... Israel, as a people, and as a nation, did not.

Jesus’ actions square with the description of the Servant, Israel’s actions do not, especially since the formation of the nation in 1948.

- **Isaiah 53:7** “...like a sheep to the slaughter...”
- **1 Peter 2:21-24** “Christ suffered for you... 23 When he was being insulted, he did not insult in return. When he was suffering, he did not threaten... 24 He himself bore our sins in his own body on the stake... And ‘by his wounds you were healed’ [Isaiah 53:5].”
- **Hebrews 9:28** “Christ was offered once for all time to bear the sins of many; and the second time that he appears it will be apart from sin, and he will be seen by those earnestly looking for him for their salvation.”

“he will apportion *the* spoil.”

Yakov: Christians can say Jesus accomplished all this but why does a divine being need to be given material things?

Answer: There is much symbolic language in the passage regardless of whether it is applied to Jesus or Israel. Neither the *spoils* nor the *war* are literal. For Jesus, the vindication of God's name is a precious "spoil" which the conquerors like him share in.

- **John 16:33** "Take courage, I have conquered the world."
 - Jesus was rewarded as a *world conqueror*; the world was not able to corrupt or deter him from completing his God given mission.
- **2 Corinthians 2:14:** "Thanks be to God who always leads us in a triumphal [victory] procession in company with the Christ and makes the odor of the knowledge of him perceptible through us in every place!"
- **Colossians 2:14, 15** "Stripping the governments and the authorities bear, he exhibited them in open public as conquered."

"...he will apportion the spoil..."

- **Revelation 3:21** "To the one that conquers I will grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

"...he poured out his soul to the very death..." Jesus never lost sight of the purpose for which he was sent to earth; to give his perfect human life as a ransom and to live as an example for sincere worshipers of Jehovah God.

- **Matthew 20:28** "The Son of man came, not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many."
- **Matthew 26:38** "My soul is deeply grieved, even to death."

"Counted among the transgressors."

- **Mark 14:48, 49** "Jesus said to them: 'Did you come out to arrest me with swords and clubs as against a robber? 49 Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and yet you did not take me into custody. Nevertheless, this is to fulfill the Scriptures.'"
- **Luke 22:36, 37** "I tell you that this which is written must be accomplished in me, namely, 'And he was reckoned with lawless ones.' For that which concerns me is having an accomplishment."
- **Mark 15:27** "...they impaled two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left."

Yakov asked (in relation to Isaiah 53:7), why Jesus "was counted as a criminal." The short answer is Jesus was counted among the transgressors because he was condemned as a criminal along with two others, one on either side—Mark 15:27.

interestingly, the Jewish authorities could have accused Jesus of criminal violence because Peter cut off the ear of the High Priest's slave. But that would have meant mentioning that Jesus had miraculously cured the injured man. So, both sides let the matter drop.

- **Luke 22:50-53** "One of them even struck the slave of the high priest, taking off his right ear. 51 But in reply Jesus said: 'That is enough.' And he touched the ear and healed him. 52 Jesus then said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders who had come there for him: 'Did you come out with swords and clubs as against a robber? 53 While I was with you in the temple day after

day, you did not lay your hands on me. But this is your hour and the authority of darkness.”

“...**he interceded for the transgressors.**” (Compare Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15.) Jesus endured extreme trials, humiliation and execution in order to cover the transgressions of his own people. (Isaiah 53:8) He was merciful and caring toward condemned and dying mankind.

Jehovah displayed boundless mercy by sending Jesus as his Servant. There was too much at stake to entrust this mission to anyone but his son, even at the cost of his son’s life.

- **Romans 8:31** “If God is for us, who will be against us? 32 Since he did not even spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, will he not also, along with him, kindly give us all other things?”
- **John 3:16** “God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”

Some 2000 years before Jesus, God had prevented Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac. But that prophetic act became reality when Jehovah allowed his own son to be sacrificed for mankind.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

The first three verses of the Servant passage (52:13-15), and the final two verses, are complimentary in that they describe the future exaltation of the Servant (53:11, 12). The final verses of Isaiah 53, return to that event giving details of what the Servant’s mission accomplished, and the reason God exalted him. The following table highlights the complimentary aspects of these passages (God is the narrator in both).

SIMILARITIES OF ISAIAH 53:11, 12 and 52:13-15

<p>53:11 “Because of his anguish, he will see and be satisfied. By means of his knowledge the righteous one, my servant, will bring a righteous standing to many people, and their errors he will bear.”</p> <p>53:12 “For that reason I will assign him a portion among the many, and he will apportion the spoil with the mighty, because he poured out his life even to death and was counted among the transgressors; he carried the sin of many people, and he interceded for the transgressors.”</p>	<p>52:13 “Look! My servant will act with insight. He will be raised up high, he will be elevated and greatly exalted.”</p> <p>52:14 “Just as there were many who stared at him in amazement — For his appearance was disfigured more than that of any other man and his stately form more than that of mankind.”</p> <p>52:15 “So he will startle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths before him, because they will see what they had not been told and give consideration to what they had not heard.”</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

SUMMARY

Why the Servant is an individual: According to Isaiah 53, the Servant is a prophet, he knows how his mission will turn out, and explains it to others. He is also without sin, a

compassionate and self-sacrificing leader who offers a unique sacrifice, his own soul, as a guilt offering. (Compare Isaiah 53:4-9.) He is finally rewarded after sacrificing his life as a guilt offering on behalf of the trespasses of others, continues serving God, and kings pay him homage when they witness his spectacular glorification. The Servant fits the expectations of a second Moses and thus, the Messiah.

Why Jesus fits the description of the Servant: Jesus was a prophet, like the Servant; he had a perfect grasp of his mission, knew how it would turn out, and explained it to others. He was a compassionate and self-sacrificing leader who gave his life for others. (Compare Isaiah 53:4-9.) Jesus, like the prophecy about the Servant, was rewarded and continues serving God after his sacrificial death on behalf of others. Kings will pay homage to Jesus as the “King of Kings,” when they face him in his glorified form. Jesus fits the description of the Servant in Isaiah 52/53, as well as the expectation of a second Moses, the Messiah.

In conclusion, the Servant passage in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 can be called a restoration prophecy, but in this case the Servant effects a moral and ethical restoration as well as a liberation from condemnation due to transgressions. To accomplish this, the Servant sacrificed himself as a *guilt offering* for Jews and gentiles alike.

∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov never got back to us with his comments on the above, so we have no idea how he would respond to the questions that we posed. Even so, we know his thoughts on the evidence we provided regarding the accusations that Christian translations are “changing the words of my G-d,” because he commented on similar information when we discussed the article, *Isaiah 53 – The Suffering Servant*. —Addendum 3.

Yakov wrote, “So you think that by showing some Jewish translations that coincide with the Christian ones you prove that Jesus is the Messiah?” Naturally, that was not the point. The fact that Jewish and Christian translations are the same in these contentious passages demonstrates conclusively that there is no Christian *distortion* and *mistranslation*, as Roth, Yakov, and many Jewish outreach articles are so fond of repeating. The accusation exposes the accuser of bad faith or poor research, or maybe both.

After receiving definitive answers to each of his questions and objections on Isaiah 52/53, the very passage he felt exposed Christians for mistranslating and manipulating the text (and berating me for not answering his questions more quickly), Yakov cut off all contact.

NOTE: The information in the above article discusses some ten instances where Jewish translations coincide with Christian translations. Not a single accusation of Yakov’s was justified. However, there are five instances where either Chabad and/or *Artscroll* manipulated their translation of a text to match a specific Rabbinic commentary.

The term “living God,” in Jeremiah 23:36 (“...changed the words of the *living God*...”) is significant, appearing some 15 times in the Tanakh. The thrust of the term is that Almighty God is well aware of what these people are up to.

∞ ∞ ∞

[WHY THE JEWISH EXPLANATION OF JEWISH SUFFERING IS UNACCEPTABLE](#)

The conversation we had on Roth's article (Addendum 4) sparked a lengthy back and forth on WhatsApp regarding Jewish suffering and whether the Jews are still God's chosen people. Here are excerpts from that conversation.

Yakov: Read the Tanakh for passages where G-d says Israel will fall off the path. Until they don't get back on track they will suffer. G-d is not in a rush, he will wait till his people return to him. It took 2700 years because his people did not return to G-d... It is as simple as that...

1. 2700 years ago they sinned and were sent into exile
2. For 2700 years they did not get their act right, so they stayed in exile
3. In the last 70 years we are seeing a change as promised by G-d that Israel will return to him, and they have.
4. For the last 70 years they have been blessed and are able to bless the gentiles.

So simple. Your question of a loving G-d keeping his people in exile for 2700 years is not a G-d issue, it is Israel's issue. So simple. Don't blame G-d, he told you what he expects.

Me: In what you have written I perceive that you are somewhat baffled that anyone may have read the same texts as you and come to a different conclusion... You are presenting your view of certain texts. I believe your view of those texts is wrong... your interpretation of the scriptures is incomplete, and other scriptures help to round out the idea.

Yakov: I am not presenting anyone's view. I am presenting G-d's view... all I am doing is presenting G-d's view based on Tanakh.

∞ ∞ ∞

Since Yakov quoted a number of texts, I thought it would be good to flesh out the WhatsApp chat explanation of why it is anti-biblical and God dishonoring to teach that God has allowed "his people" to suffer inexplicable harm for 2500+ years.

An integral aspect of the Orthodox Jewish interpretation of the Servant passage in Isaiah 52/53, is the belief that Jewish suffering has been God's way of bringing them back to Torah by allowing the gentile nations to persecute them. This *chastisement* not only includes Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and Israel's 70-year exile (foretold in Isaiah), but also Rome's destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, numerous persecutions at the hands of "Christians" beginning in the 4th Century, the crusades, inquisitions, wholesale expulsions from Christian nations, the pogroms in Eastern Europe and finally, the Holocaust, with 6 million Jewish deaths, 1.5 million of those being children. We are looking at some 2500+ years of Jewish suffering to "bring them back to Torah." Yakov believes, along with many others, that the time of chastisement began its end in 1948 with the establishment of Israel as a sovereign state, though many secular and Orthodox Jews disagree... loudly.⁵

The Jewish nation has the tragic distinction of suffering more consistently, over the longest period, and arguably, the cruelest persecution in history at the hands of the Nazis. The essence of the explanation of Jewish suffering is summarized in the following three statements:

- The Jews are God's chosen people.
- 2500+ years of Jewish suffering.

- God is loving and merciful.

Most Jews and non-Jews would probably say that the three statements are irreconcilable as they stand. For them, the belief that a loving and merciful God has allowed his “chosen people” to be chastised in the worst ways imaginable for thousands of years, is unthinkable. Some would say, “If God’s plan was to bring the Jews back to Torah through suffering, it hasn’t worked.” Moreover, it makes God seem heartless and cruel, in short, it makes God seem very unappealing, even objectionable.

On the other hand, Jewish orthodoxy would see nothing contradictory or troublesome in the statements. As Orthodox Jews they believe God is loving and merciful *because* he has chosen them to be his special property. As far as Jewish suffering is concerned, they would say, “that’s God’s business, our obligation is to ‘do and hear,’ without questioning.”—Exodus 24:7.

When someone says that God is responsible for Jewish suffering, Yakov’s reply is in perfect sync with the rest of Orthodox Judaism, “God is not responsible, the Babylonians, Romans, Christians, various nations and Nazis did it, *not* God.”

This attempt at the justification of God’s supposed actions is not convincing. It is analogous to a parent putting his child in the middle of a busy street as punishment for misbehaving and then, when a car runs him over, the onlookers say: “The father isn’t responsible for the boy’s death, the driver of the car is.” A judge would ask: “But who put the child in harm’s way?” The answer is obvious, or at least it should be. The illustration highlights the unreasonableness of saying, “God allowed the Jews to suffer but He is not responsible for their persecutions.”

The explanation of God’s *modus operandi*, as Orthodox Judaism would have it, is obviously unsatisfying. This is likely part of the reason why only 15% of Israelis are observant. God’s character, as the orthodox portray it, has little drawing power for the majority.

Orthodoxy, and Yakov, would say, “It doesn’t matter what people think, the covenant God made with the Jews is an *everlasting* covenant that can never be broken. It is what it is, the Jews are God’s chosen people, so just get over it.” Does the Tanakh support that claim?

God’s Covenant with Israel was not eternal: God’s covenant with Israel was bilateral, which means it was not unconditional, it was not eternal. In every bilateral contract both sides must meet certain obligations. If one of the parties fails to meet their contractual obligations, the deal is null and void.

- **Exodus 19:5, 6** “Now *if* you will strictly obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will certainly become my special property out of all peoples, for the whole earth belongs to me. 6 You will become to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.”

The operative word in the above passage is, “*if*.” It means the contract is conditional; *if* they “strictly obey” God’s voice he will do this and that, and *if* they don’t, he won’t. Such is the significance of the word “if.”

Exodus 19:5, 6 hints right from the outset that God planned to establish a different covenant with Israel so they could be a “kingdom of priests.” Such a thing was not

possible under the constraints of the Mosaic Covenant since priests were only taken from the tribe of Levi. What was a *hint* in Exodus 19:5, 6, was clarified centuries later in Jeremiah chapter 31.

- **Jeremiah 31:31-33** “Look! The days are coming,’ declares Jehovah, ‘when I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their forefathers on the day I took hold of their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, ‘my covenant that they broke, although I was their true master,’ declares Jehovah.”

The “new covenant” spoken of above, would be one that was different from the Mosaic Covenant in various ways, as the passage below shows.

- **Jeremiah 31:33, 34** “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares Jehovah. ‘I will put my law within them, and in their heart I will write it. And I will become their God, and they will become my people.’ And they will no longer teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know Jehovah!’ for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them, declares Jehovah. For I will forgive their error, and I will no longer remember their sin.”

The phrases, “they will all know me,” and “they will no longer teach... each one his brother, [to] Know Jehovah,” lines up with the promise in Exodus 19:5, 6, that they would become a nation of priests.

- **Malachi 2:7** “...the lips of a priest are the ones that should keep knowledge, and [the] law is what people should seek from his mouth.”

The expression “kingdom of priests,” transmits the idea of an ambassador nation commissioned to tell other nations about their God. The New Covenant is also related to the forgiveness of sins, as indicated in Jeremiah 31:34.

In Jeremiah 31:32, God refers to the Mosaic Covenant as “my covenant that they [Israel] broke.” Since Israel did not keep their part of the bargain, God was disobliged from previous contractual obligations to Israel and could now offer anyone he would choose the opportunity to take part in the New Covenant.

The New Covenant was an important aspect of Jesus’ teaching:

- **Matthew 21:42, 43** “Jesus said to them: ‘Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone that the builders rejected, this has become the chief cornerstone.’ This has come from Jehovah, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 This is why I say to you, **‘the Kingdom of God will be taken from you and be given to a nation producing its fruits.’**”

Jesus undoubtedly had Jeremiah 31 in mind, as well as other prophecies, when he inaugurated the New Covenant with his disciples the night before his execution.

- **Luke 22:20, 29** “Also, he did the same with the cup [as with the loaf]... saying: ‘This cup means the **new covenant** by virtue of my blood, which is to be poured out in your behalf... 29 and I make a covenant with you... for a kingdom.’”

The New Covenant is the *legal* basis on which Christianity was formed. Israel was taken into a Covenant with God, with Moses as mediator, in the Sinai desert, and Jesus became the “mediator of a new covenant” in Jerusalem in 33 CE. Both Peter and John quote from Exodus 19, and Paul quotes from Jeremiah 31.

- **1 Peter 2:9, 10** “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession, that you should declare abroad the excellencies of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 For you were once not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not been shown mercy, but now you have received mercy.”
- **Revelation 5:10** “...you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth.”
- **Hebrews 8:8-13** “‘Look! The days are coming,’ says Jehovah, ‘when I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant. 9 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their forefathers on the day I took hold of their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not remain in my covenant, so I stopped caring for them,’ says Jehovah. 10 ‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Jehovah. I will put my laws in their mind, and in their hearts I will write them. And I will become their God, and they will become my people. 11 And they will no longer teach each one his fellow citizen and each one his brother, saying: Know Jehovah! For they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them. 12 For I will be merciful toward their unrighteous deeds, and I will no longer call their sins to mind.’ **In his saying ‘a new covenant,’ he has made the former one obsolete.** Now what is obsolete and growing old is near to vanishing away.”
- **Hebrews 9:15** “That is why he is a mediator of a new covenant, in order that because a death has occurred for their release by ransom from the transgressions under the former covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the everlasting inheritance.”
- **Hebrews 10:16-18** “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days,’ says Jehovah. ‘I will put my laws in their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.’ 17 Then it says: ‘And I will no longer call their sins and their lawless deeds to mind.’ 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:20** “Therefore, we are ambassadors substituting for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us. As substitutes for Christ, we beg: ‘Become reconciled to God.’”

The term “ambassadors” is related to the priestly duties alluded to in Exodus 19:5, 6 and Jeremiah 31. As such, the king-priests of the New Covenant would be assigned to go to the people of the nations and teach them to “know Jehovah.”

Yakov’s objections to the above:

Yakov: The Tanakh clearly says that God’s covenant with Israel is an “eternal/everlasting covenant.”

Answer: The Hebrew word “ohlam,” translated *eternal* or *everlasting* some 15 times in relation to the word covenant, literally means “time indefinite.” Lexicographer Gesenius defines it as, “hidden time, i.e. obscure and long, of which the beginning or end is uncertain or indefinite.” (*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, translated by E. Robinson, 1836, p. 746) For examples where “ohlam” does not mean “forever,” see 1 Samuel 1:22; 2 Kings 21:7; 1 Chronicles 28:4; Jeremiah 18:16.

Two other Hebrew terms, “adh” and “netzach,” denote eternity. At times, “ohlam” and “adh” appear together: Psalms 104:5 “It [the earth] will not be made to totter to time indefinite, or forever,” (“ohlam ve adh,”). (Some translations have, “forever and ever.”)

So, “ohlam,” can mean forever, or an undetermined time (compare Exodus 40:15). God’s covenant with Israel could have been eternal had the nation fulfilled its covenantal obligations. But, because of their disobedience, it turned out to be a covenant to “time indefinite,” rather than eternal. (In some cases even “netzach” does not mean forever. Compare Psalm 13:1, literally: “How long, O Jehovah, will you forget me forever?”)

Yakov: The covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-33 refers to the *renewal* of God’s covenant with Israel after their release from Babylon.

Answer: The “new covenant” is not a *renewal* of God’s covenant because the text says it is not: Jeremiah 31:31 “I will make... a *new* covenant. 32 It will *not* be like the covenant that I made with their forefathers.”

Yakov: “The following text clearly shows that God’s covenant with Israel would be eternal.”

- **Jeremiah 31:35** “So said the Lord, who gives the sun to illuminate by day, the laws of the moon and the stars to illuminate at night, who stirs up the sea and its waves roar, the Lord of Hosts is His name. 35 ‘If these laws depart from before Me,’ says the Lord, ‘so will the seed of Israel cease being a nation before Me for all time.’ 36 So said the Lord: ‘If the heavens above will be measured and the foundations of the earth below will be fathomed, I too will reject all the seed of Israel because of all they did, says the Lord.’”

Answer: The above text is part of the context of Jeremiah 31:31-33 and refers to the New Covenant in the previous verses, not the Mosaic Covenant. The “house of Israel and Judah” were the first ones invited to take part in the New Covenant, but most refused. (Compare Matthew 22:1-15.)

Yakov: Jeremiah also shows that Israel would continue as God’s people and never be destroyed.

- **Jeremiah 46:27** “You fear not, O Jacob My servant, and be not dismayed, O Israel! For behold, I will redeem you from afar and your children from the land of their captivity, and Jacob shall return and be quiet and at ease, and there shall be none who disturb his rest. 28 You fear not, My servant Jacob,’ says the Lord, ‘for I am with you, for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, but of you I will not make a full end, but **I will chastise you *justly*, and I will not completely destroy you.**”

Answer: This is a restoration prophecy that was fulfilled when Israel was released from Babylon. (Compare Jeremiah 46:26.) The nations that oppressed Israel were destroyed. Israel survived, was released from Babylonian captivity and returned to Jerusalem, just as the prophecy stated.

Yakov: Deuteronomy predicts the punishment the Jews would receive if they disobeyed and it has been fulfilled on Israel, but that doesn’t mean they are no longer God’s chosen people.

- **Deuteronomy 28:15** “And it must occur that if you will not listen to the voice of Jehovah your God by taking care to do all his commandments and his statutes that I am commanding you today, all these maledictions must also come upon you and overtake you.”

Answer: The text only compounds the problem of Jewish suffering. The *maledictions* come upon Israel if they didn't "keep *all* his commandments." Without a Temple, there is no way for Jews to fulfill some 200 of the 613 commandments. If Deuteronomy 28 still applies, then the Jews will never come out from under the curses because it says they have to fulfill "*all* his commandments and statutes." An abundance of excuses are offered as to why commandments related to the Temple (priesthood, sacrifices etc) are no longer binding, but these are, after all, excuses. The text says what it says.

God has made it clear he no longer considers the Jewish nation his chosen people:

- The New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-33, was inaugurated by Jesus as mediator, at his last Passover.
- When Jesus was killed, the thick curtain separating the Holy from the Most Holy in the Temple, was split in two from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:51) This was a divine act that no human could have done. The Temple was no longer significant from God's point of view, and he let it be known.
- That God had chosen a new nation under a New Covenant, became clear on the day of Pentecost when Jesus' followers received Holy Spirit and were granted to speak to those gathered in Jerusalem in languages they had no previous knowledge of.—Acts 2:4-12.
- After Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 CE, as Jesus had predicted (Matthew 24:2), it was never rebuilt. In contrast, the First Temple, destroyed by the Babylonians, was rebuilt with God's blessing when the Jews returned from Babylon.
- Today's Judaism is *Rabbinic* Judaism. Biblical Judaism ceased to exist with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE: *Biblical* Judaism does not exist without a Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices.

A Jewish reader might object that the first three points in the list are based on the Christian Scriptures which are not valid from a Jewish perspective. Fair enough. Even with only the two final points, it still cannot be denied that there is no Temple in Jerusalem and that Judaism, as defined in the Tanakh, does not exist. Rabbinic Judaism exists, but not Biblical Judaism. Though this may be seen as a hard truth, it is *truth* nonetheless and cannot be denied or circumvented.

Conclusion: We return to the three-statement-conundrum...

- The Jews are God's chosen people.
- 2500+ years of Jewish suffering.
- God is loving and merciful.

As discussed, Orthodox Jews would agree with all three of the above statements, seeing no contradiction, "they're good as they are, don't touch them." The majority would disagree and say that any two of the statements could fit together but there is no way to make sense of all three as they stand, one of the statements must be modified if the list is to be coherent and morally acceptable. What sort of modification could reconcile the three statements? Obviously, the second statement, "2500+ years of Jewish suffering," is not open to revision because it is a fact.

Many, Holocaust survivors and others I knew in Israel, would not hesitate to say that the third statement should be changed from, "God is loving and merciful," to "God is *not*

loving and merciful.” That would reconcile all three statements: “God allowed his chosen people to suffer for thousands of years because he is *not* loving and merciful,” end of story... “and don’t bother me anymore with this question.” That solution, sad as it is, would make sense from their perspective in view of all they have seen and suffered.

Still others, including many Israelis I’ve met who have also been victims of persecution, either know that the description of God in the Tanakh clashes with the orthodox explanation or feel in their heart that it cannot be right. And it isn’t. God told Jeremiah, “I have drawn you to me with loyal love.” (Jeremiah 31:3) Those words paint a very different picture to the Orthodox explanation: “God will continue to allow us to be beaten silly until every last one of you repents.” So, this second group, unwilling to see God as complicit in Jewish suffering, would point to the first statement as the one that should be changed. From: “The Jews are God’s chosen people,” to: “The Jews are *no longer* God’s chosen people.” That change would make sense of all three statements: “God *is* loving and merciful and did *not* put the Jews in harm’s way for millennia to *inspire* them to repent since they are no longer his chosen people.”

Of the two statements open to modification, the only option that is intellectually honest, morally acceptable, *and* leaves one’s faith – *and* sanity – intact, is adding the words, “no longer,” to the first statement. A small modification with great ramifications. It opens up horizons, makes possible a positive reassessment of one’s view of God, and restores a welcome normalcy to the meaning of everyday words like *love* and *mercy*, especially as these relate to God.

Accepting that the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people, not only reconciles all three statements, but, importantly, it leaves room for hope that God can be trusted to rectify world conditions without having to wait for the nation of Israel to repent and return to the Torah. In both the Tanakh and Christian Scriptures, God promises to end the wars and destruction of earth’s natural resources that have put in question the survival of mankind. Is there any other reasonable hope out there?

The facts speak for themselves; God has not been training Israel to be a light to the nations in the Messianic Age by allowing Jewish persecution and suffering for more than two and a half millennia. That is not God’s way of doing things according to the Tanakh.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

A FINAL OBSERVATION ON JEWISH REPENTANCE AND THE MESSIANIC AGE:

Yakov points to the formation of modern Israel as a sign of Jewish repentance and the approaching Messianic Age: “In the last 70 years we are seeing a change as promised by G-d that Israel will return to him, and they have... been blessed and are able to bless the gentiles.” Many Christians would agree with Yakov... I beg to differ.

The state of Israel and Israel’s *spiritual* state are very different matters. International standing is not a barometer by which a nation’s spirituality is measured, at least not in God’s eyes.

- “When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations... 12 For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you. 13 You must be wholehearted with the Lord your God.”—Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

What then is the spiritual and moral state of Israel today?

Spirituality: According to the Jerusalem post, Israel is one of the least religious countries in the world.—See Endnote 4.

- “O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.—Isaiah 48:18.

Morality: “In an international ‘morality’ survey, Israelis have emerged as more relaxed than the average global citizen on a range of issues including homosexuality and pre-marital sex... Haifa University sociologist Sammy Smoocha said that on social issues, ‘Israelis are very liberal.’” And Mitchell Barak, a pollster, said, “mainstream Israel is among the most liberal populations in the world.”

- 12% more Israelis approve of premarital sex than the global average.
 - “You have wearied the Lord with your words... By your saying, ‘Every evildoer is good in the Lord’s sight, and He desires them.’”—Malachi 2:17.
- 7% more Israelis than the global average say homosexuality is acceptable.
 - “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence.” — Leviticus 18:22.
- 21% fewer Israelis oppose abortion.⁶
 - God’s law to Moses protected the life of an unborn baby against more than criminal abortion. (Compare Ex 21:22-25; Psalm 127:3.) Inducing an abortion or miscarriage by artificial means, to avoid the birth of an unwanted child, is a crime in God’s sight.

Divorce Rate in Israel: “In the wake of recent statistics revealing a staggering 47.3% divorce rate in Israel, the nation finds itself grappling with the multifaceted implications of a system deeply intertwined with religious and civil law.”⁷

- “I detest divorce – said the LORD, the God of Israel.”—Malachi 2:16.

Israel and Litigation: “Israel is a highly litigious state. It has the highest number of lawyers per capita, and an overwhelming number of claims filed each year... approximately 84 000 new claims and appeals were filed in 2021 – roughly one claim per 11 citizens.”⁸

- According to the Talmud (Yoma 9b), the Second Temple was destroyed because of “baseless hatred,” which was typified by incessant litigation in ancient Israel: “The sin of baseless hatred is equivalent to the three severe transgressions [that caused the destruction of the First Temple]: idol worship, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed.”—Quoted from Chabad.com, see Endnote 72.

The belief that Israel’s statehood shows that the nation has repented, returned to God and is “able to bless the gentiles,” is misguided; the suggestion confuses Israel’s statehood with Israel’s spiritual state. The idea ignores the fact that God requires *his people* to uphold his moral standards. According to Yoma 9b, flaunting God’s expressed moral standards led to the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the destruction of Jerusalem, the entire Jewish system of worship, as well as Israel’s long exile until today.

In the article, *Isaiah 53 – The Suffering Servant* (Addendum 3), Martin Roth closes by referring to the Jewish people as “bearers of God’s message of *morality* and *justice*.” The reader must decide on the validity of that statement.

CHAPTER 2 – YAKOV’S OTHER “BIG TICKET ITEMS”

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCUSSION OF MESSIANIC PASSAGES

Yakov wanted to discuss what he calls the “big ticket items” regarding Jesus; the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14, the “70 weeks” in Daniel 9:24-27, etc. But, before jumping in, I thought it would be good to first clarify some basic points regarding prophecy in general as well as the Jewish perspective regarding prophecy in the 1st Century CE. Here is our preliminary discussion.

Largely, Jewish sages determined what constitutes a messianic prophecy or reference based on shared words or phrases between texts, a method called Gezerah Shavah. This method is very different to the reliance on context, so prevalent today. For example, the Talmud interprets Genesis 1:2 as a messianic reference: Bereshit Rabbah 2 says, “‘And the spirit of God was hovering’ – this is the spirit of the messianic king, as it says: ‘The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him’ (Isaiah 11:2).” The free association of similar words and phrases – “spirit hovering,” in Genesis 1:2, and “spirit resting,” in Isaiah 11:2 – led the rabbis to this messianic interpretation rather than the context. JewsforJudaism.com puts it this way, “Rabbinic works are filled with stray verses used with no concern as to their original context or conformity to the literal meaning.”⁹ The Jewish sages explained many texts as messianic, Alfred Edersheim listed 456 references in ancient Jewish literature.¹⁰

Christians in the 1st Century, applied to Jesus the passages that fit his life, deeds, and circumstances. This included some of the texts already tagged by the rabbis, though far fewer than those the rabbis had referred to as messianic.

Following are a few examples of Talmudic texts seen as messianic that Christians believed were fulfilled in Jesus:

- Psalm 22:7, 15 (verses 8 and 16 in Tanakh)
- Psalm 110
- Isaiah 9:6
- Isaiah 52/53
- Micah 5:2
- Daniel 9:24-27
- Zechariah 9:9
- Zechariah 12:10

There are basically two types of messianic “prophecy” that Christians believed were fulfilled in Jesus:

1. Passages called “predictive prophecy,” like Isaiah 52:13-53:12.
2. Passages that are not apparently predictive, like Psalm 22, but were seen later as fulfilled in Jesus. Some of these, like Psalm 22:7, 15, were already viewed as messianic references in Jesus’ day, and others, like Isaiah 7:14, were not.

Obviously, there are objections in both cases from the Jewish standpoint that need to be addressed. Where a passage is clearly prophetic, like Isaiah 52/53, the Jewish view is

that it is wrongly applied to Jesus. Where the context is *not* apparently prophetic, like Isaiah 7:14, the question arises as to the basis for taking texts out of context and applying them “willy nilly” to Jesus.

Yakov expressed objections in both cases, but he was particularly annoyed by the apparent arbitrary application of non-predictive texts to Jesus, as exemplified by Isaiah 7:14. Following are some general points regarding the “out of context,” or non-predictive passages. The passages that are clearly prophetic/predictive are dealt with individually.

THE BASIS FOR APPLYING NON-PREDICTIVE PASSAGES TO JESUS

To thousands of Israelites who had seen and heard Jesus, the details of his life were evident in many of the messianic passages already known to them. For them, it was like connecting the dots that form a picture, it made sense. There were too many details that fit together for them to dismiss it all as mere coincidence, at least in retrospect. The determining factors that guided them in applying texts *out of context* to Jesus were: The *time*, the *person* and the *teaching*.

The *time* was right: Messianic expectation was rife in the 1st Century. Menasseh ben Israel, a 17th-Century Rabbi, wrote in *De Termino Vitae*, “Some would accept those “70 weeks” [in Daniel 9:24-27] as meaning that after their end the Messiah would come who would constitute them rulers of the whole world. Indeed, all who took up arms against the Romans at that time held that opinion.”¹¹

The Christian Scriptures agree with the above:

- **Luke 3:15** “...the people were in expectation and all of them were reasoning in their hearts about John, ‘May he perhaps be the Christ?’”
- **Jonn 1:41** “He first found his own brother Simon and said to him: ‘We have found the Messiah.’”
- **John 4:25** “The woman said to him: I know that Messiah is coming... Whenever that one comes, he will declare all things to us openly.
- **Acts 2:36, 41; 4:4; 6:7** [On Pentecost/Shavuot, 33 CE, Peter said to the crowd:] “...let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ [Messiah]... 41 So those who gladly accepted his word were baptized, and on that day about 3,000 people were added... 4:4 [shortly thereafter] the number of the men became about 5,000... 6:7 and a large crowd of priests began to be obedient to the faith...”

The *person* was right: People could see that Jesus was different from other *messiahs* that had come before him. Jesus was not a military messiah like the others who promised to liberate Jerusalem from Roman domination. He was compassionate and not out for notoriety, financial gain or political power.

- **Matthew 11:29** “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for yourselves.”
- **Matthew 15:21** “Many also followed him, and he cured them all, 16 but *he sternly ordered them not to make him known*, 17 in order to fulfil what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet [42:1-3], who said: 18 ‘Look! My servant whom I chose, my beloved, whom I have approved! I will put my spirit upon him, and what justice is he will make clear to the nations. 19 He will not quarrel nor cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the main streets. 20 No bruised reed will he crush, and no smoldering wick will he extinguish.’”

- **Mark 1:40, 41** “There also came to him a leper, pleading with him even on bended knee, saying to him: ‘If you just want to, you can make me clean.’ 41 At that he was moved with pity, and he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him: ‘*I want to!* Be made clean.’”

His teaching was right: Jesus taught about God’s Kingdom from an ethical and moral angle whose objectives and personal impact on his followers were very different to that of the military messiahs.

- **Matthew 7:29** “[Jesus] was teaching them as a person having authority, and *not* as their scribes.”
- **Matthew 26:52** “[Jesus said] ‘all those who take the sword will perish by the sword.’”
- **Luke 19:8** “[The tax collector] Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord: ‘Look! The half of my belongings, Lord, I am giving to the poor, and whatever I extorted from anyone, I am restoring four times over.’”
- **Jewish historian Joseph Klausner** wrote: “A man like Jesus, for whom the ethical ideal was everything, was something hitherto unheard of in the Judaism of the day... Thus, his ethical teaching, apparently goes beyond that of *Pirkē Aboth* and of other *Talmudic* and *Midrashic* literature. It is not lost in a sea of legal prescriptions and items of secular information.”—*Jesus of Nazareth-His Life, Times, and Teaching*, pages 389-90.

With the foregoing in mind, Bible writers took note of texts that lined up with Jesus’ life in two ways. First, texts that were already regarded as messianic would naturally have led them to others in the same passage that applied to Jesus. For example, Isaiah 42:1, quoted above, was already understood messianically. (See the Targum and Yalkut.) Reading further, Christians could see that verses 2-4 also fit Jesus. Psalm 22 is another example: Verses 7 and 15, already seen as messianic, would have led them to other verses in that chapter that fit Jesus’ life and experiences. Especially is this so in view of verse 1, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”— the same words Jesus cried out shortly before he died.—Matthew 27:46.

Also, as eyewitnesses, they could match Jesus’ deeds and experiences to appropriate texts even if these had not been previously understood as messianic. For example, after Jesus cleansed the Temple area of the money changers, “His disciples recalled that it is written: “The zeal for your house will consume me” (John 2:17), which is a quote from Psalm 69:9. Viewing passages in this way was very much in line with the Jewish way of viewing texts; called “*peshar*” application in Hebrew. The specific interpretation of a text may have been criticized, but not the “*peshar*” method that was employed to arrive at the interpretation because that was the way it was done.

The messianic hope was foremost in their minds and the average Israelite probably had a fair idea of the texts considered messianic. The disciples seemed to know texts by memory; John 2:17 says, “His disciples *recalled* that it is written [in Psalm 69:9]...” Pretty good for “uneducated and ordinary men.” (Acts 4:13) Then there was a blind man who, after being cured by Jesus, told the pharisees, “From of old it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of one born blind.” (John 9:32) Blind from birth, and yet he knew the miracles in the Tanakh! In an interchange between Jesus and the Pharisees, in Matthew 22:43-45, Jesus asked them: “How is it, then, that David under inspiration calls him [the Messiah] Lord [in Psalm 110:1], saying, ‘My Lord [Jehovah] said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies beneath your feet’? If,

then, David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" Notice that Jesus quoted the text from memory and the Pharisees also recognized it. It would seem that there was a fair amount of scriptural knowledge, especially regarding messianic texts.

At the end of the day, there is a more basic issue than the knowledge of messianic passages and the ability to recall them; the way God works is the major issue. Jesus told his disciples that "the *holy spirit* will... bring back to your minds all the things I told you." (John 14:26) So, God's spirit was involved both in the process of memory and the correct application of texts.

Devout Jews accept that God employed his spirit to accomplish the inspiration of the Tanakh (2 Samuel 23:2), but are understandably reticent about the Christian Scriptures. Still, if one is willing to accept that God has used his spirit in a certain way in regard to the Tanakh, then it is also possible that he has worked in the same way in regard to the Christian Scriptures. The question is whether he has or not.

How God works: There seems to be four ways that God has worked in regard to the messiah.

1. God planted the texts in the Tanakh that could be recognized and form a picture later on when the messiah appeared. The texts included clear messianic passages as well as other texts that would be applied to the messiah according to his actions and teaching.¹²
2. God relied on human nature, knowing that pertinent passages would be singled out because of the importance of the messianic theme.
3. God sent Jesus as the Messiah. Things he did and said lined up with the messianic passages already spread and recognized throughout the Tanakh. These passages form a picture when assembled. The picture is not a product of coincidence; it is there because God wanted it there. Jesus did and said what God wanted, and people got the picture. So, formal, predictive prophecies, and other texts relating to the messiah, gave a basic picture of *how to identify* the messiah, and the passages that were applied afterward completed the picture of *who he was*.

To illustrate, here is a picture of Julia (whoever she may be).



It is made up of about a hundred different small images. Could it possibly be the product of random photos thrown together that happened to come out looking like Julia... just a coincidence? Possibly... But what are the odds?

4. Finally, God calls sincere ones and, with his spirit, helps them understand the messianic message and how it pertains to Jesus:

- **Isaiah 30:21** “And your own ears will hear a word behind you saying, ‘This is the way. Walk in it,’ in case you should go to the right or in case you should go to the left.”
- **John 6:44** “No man can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws him.”

The main issues are, and have always been, the person of Jesus, and the integrity of the Christian Scriptures. Focusing on the prophecies alone was never the main question that Israelites contemplated regarding Jesus. They were looking at much more than predictive prophecies, they were aware of who Jesus was as a person as well as the details of his life, and they looked at those texts that were apparently non-predictive according to the reality of their situation, rather than a strict interpretation of a specific passage according to its context. That *method* of applying texts was never criticized, regardless of whether one agreed with the application of the text or not. Today’s focus on the context of prophecies as if that were *the* issue, ignores the bigger picture of the way things were understood in the 1st Century and, more importantly, the way God works.

Today’s anti-missionary groups will praise the rabbis who tagged nearly 500 texts as messianic, while criticizing writers of the Christian Scriptures for applying some of these texts to Jesus using the same system as the rabbis. One glaring difference between the two groups is that the Christians never applied messianic texts to nationalistic *messiahs*, or to those who were hungry for power, prominence or personal gain.

When before the Sanhedrin, the apostles said, “But as for us, we cannot stop speaking about the *things we have seen and heard*.”—Acts 4:20.

What exactly did they *see and hear*?

- They saw Jesus’ miracles, including the resurrections he performed.
- They heard God’s voice from heaven... 3 times!
- They heard Jesus’ preaching about God’s Kingdom.
- They saw he was kind, honest and compassionate.
- They saw the transfiguration.—Matthew 17:1-9.
- They saw the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecies: his betrayal, his unjust trial, execution, and, eventually, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.
- They saw and spoke to Jesus after he was resurrected.
- At Pentecost 33 CE, they received holy spirit and were able to speak in languages previously unknown to them.
- 3000 were baptized on Pentecost, and another 2000 shortly after that, including a “*great crowd of priests*.”

A lot of questions need to be thought through:

Why did so many thousands accept Jesus at that time? What reasons did they have?

What caused so many Jewish priests to accept him?

Why did the nation as a whole reject Jesus as the messiah?

Were the Apostles and all the others lying about seeing the resurrected Jesus?
Mass hysteria?

Paul says that Jesus appeared to him on his way to Damascus. *Did he really?*

The apostles received holy spirit, did miracles, and a couple of them even raised the dead. *Did they really?*

Is it all just lies and myths? *To what end?* For many of those first disciples, it meant hardship, expulsion from the synagogue and society at large, persecution, and even a violent death.

When the Sanhedrin was considering what to do with the apostles, one of the distinguished members of that body, Gamaliel, told them, “I say to you, do not meddle with these men, but let them alone. For if this scheme or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; but *if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them*. Otherwise, you may even be found fighting against God himself.” (Acts 5:38, 39)

Conclusion: Today, nearly 2¼ billion people believe Jesus is the Messiah: Jesus... a Jewish carpenter in his thirties, from a small town in the rural north of Israel, condemned by his own religious leaders as a blasphemer, executed by the Romans as an insurrectionist and a member of a nation historically despised! No one could possibly have figured that such an individual would be viewed by one third of mankind as the Messiah, “the root of Jesse... a signal for the peoples.”—Isaiah 11:1.

- **Rabbi H. Enelow** wrote: “No sensible Jew can be indifferent to the fact that a Jew should have had such a tremendous part in the religious education and direction of the human race.”—*The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, Jakób Jocz, 1954, page 142.

Coincidence? Possibly... But what are the odds? First Century bookies would have offered a billion to one against the proposition.

How can one be sure they are reaching a valid conclusion regarding such an important, and emotional, issue? In her book, *The Scout Mindset: Why Some People See Things Clearly and Others Don't*, author Julia Galef remarks with notable insight: “Being smart, and knowledgeable is not sufficient for seeing the world as clearly as possible. You also need to have the right motivation guiding that intelligence and knowledge in the right direction.” Checking one’s motivation regarding issues that involve the heart as well as the mind, is challenging and takes some soul searching. It is also wise to make it a matter of prayer.

∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov: My view is, if a prophecy that can apply to millions of people and you take 100s of such prophecies and call it “not coincidence,” this is not a safe bet, I feel. I actually proved to one Jehovah Witness person that 50% of these generic claims happened to him. BTW, 85% of mouse DNA is the same as human DNA and 63% of spider DNA is the same as human DNA.

Answer: Yakov, you understate the case since statistics can be notoriously deceptive. Your 50% statistic falls way short of anything that might be considered a possibility. There were a lot of requisites the Messiah had to fill. Just to name a few...

- A male Jew, which disqualified the vast majority of the human race at that time.

- From the tribe of Judah. Another disqualifier.
- A descendant of King David. The same.
- Born in the 1st Century before the destruction of the Second Temple. Humanity before and after is out of court.
- Born in the town of Bethlehem. Small town, with few inhabitants.
- A wonderful teacher.
- Peaceful, not a military messiah.
- Wrongly condemned. That cuts the possibilities way down.
- Executed with condemned criminals.
- They cast lots over his garments. How many was that done to?
- Buried with the rich.
- He would become, “[a] signal for the peoples... To him the nations will turn for guidance.” (Isaiah 11:10)
- And a list of etcetera’s...

You see, it’s not a matter of 99.9% and you’re good. It’s *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*; miss one miniscule point and it’s game over. For example, 98.8% of chimp DNA is the same as human DNA. But thank God for that 1.2% difference! Otherwise we would all be living in trees instead of houses. As the saying goes: “Close only counts in horseshoes.”

∞ ∞ ∞

ISAIAH 7:14: “THE YOUNG WOMAN IS WITH CHILD... SHE SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL”

ISAIAH 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; ‘behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.’”—*Septuagint*.

MATTHEW 1:22, 23: “But all this hath come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying: 23 ‘Lo! a Virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.’”—*Rotherham*.

Isaiah 7:1-18 “In the reign of Ahaz... King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel marched upon Jerusalem to attack it; but they were not able to attack it. 2 Now, when it was reported to the House of David that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, their hearts... trembled as trees of the forest. 3 But the Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out with your son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz... 4 And say to him... ‘Do not be afraid... on account of the raging of Rezin and his Arameans and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because the Arameans— with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah— have plotted against you’... 7 thus said my Lord God: ‘It shall not succeed... 8 For the chief... of Damascus is Rezin... 9 And the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. And in another sixty-five years, Ephraim shall be shattered as a people... 11 ‘Ask for a sign from the Lord your God, anywhere down to Sheol or up to the sky.’ 12 But Ahaz replied, ‘I will not ask, and I will not test the Lord’... 13 [Isaiah] retorted, ‘is it not enough for you to treat men as helpless that you also treat my God as helpless? 14 Assuredly, my Lord will give you a sign of His own accord! Look, the young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel. 15 (By the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good, people will be feeding on curds and honey.) 16 For before the lad knows to reject the bad and choose the good, the ground whose two kings you dread shall be abandoned. 17 The Lord will cause to come upon you and your people and

your ancestral house such days as never have come since Ephraim turned away from Judah— that selfsame king of Assyria!”—*JSB*.

PREMBLE TO THE DISCUSSION: Though Yakov includes Isaiah 7:14 as one of the “big ticket items,” I personally never saw the text that way. I was more impressed with prophecies such as Isaiah 52/53 and Daniel 9:24-26 and the concept of a perfect human offering his life as a ransom sacrifice for humanity. The reasonableness of the whole idea and how it was explained by writers of the Christian Scriptures, is what I found convincing. Isaiah 7:14 was *interesting* to me, but it was the objective which impressed me much more than the way in which it was achieved, the virgin birth.

Anyway, here is where we get into the weeds on Isaiah 7:14 and the virgin birth, the context of the passage, the Hebrew as well as the Greek Septuagint, and the reliability of the Christian Scriptures.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov: “Mary was a virgin and still she conceived,” is an assertion and needs to be *accepted by faith*. A sign should be non-disputable right? In the Tanakh, a sign [“ote”] is always something that can be seen and verified and does not need belief or faith. Isaiah 8:18 “I and the children JH has given me...” A sign could be supernatural like the 10 plagues in Egypt, but it could just be normal. The key is they have to be visible and verifiable:

- **Genesis 1:14** “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as *signs* to mark sacred times, and days and years...”
- **Genesis 9:12** “And God said, ‘This is the *sign* of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come.’”
- **Genesis 9:13** “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the *sign* of the covenant between me and the earth.”
- **Genesis 9:17** “So God said to Noah, ‘This is the *sign* of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.’”
- **Genesis 17:11** “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the *sign* of the covenant between me and you.”
- **Exodus 3:12** “And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’”
- **Jeremiah 10:2** “This is what the Lord says: ‘Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by *signs* in the heavens, though the nations are terrified by them.’”
- **Jeremiah 31:21** “Set up road *signs*; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, Virgin Israel, return to your towns.”

Answer: There are two parts to the question. The first is whether belief in the virgin birth demands faith. Well... yes, belief in the virgin birth is obviously an act of faith. But so is your acceptance of many of the details surrounding Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 7 that lack any objective evidence to back them up. For example, you believe that:

- Isaiah went out to meet Ahaz with his son and told him two prophecies. How do you know that happened?
- You also believe a child was born as a sign and “the land the two kings occupied” was abandoned *before* the boy knew the difference between bad and good— Isaiah 7:16.

Do you have any evidence to prove that part of the account wasn't made up and part written later?

Evidence of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom exists, but there is no evidence for all of the surrounding details; Isaiah's meeting with the King, the dialogue, birth of a child, the name, etc. You accept all of this on faith (and so do I, by the way). Others would say that the whole thing is an artful invention, history disguised as prophecy inside the trappings of a story written long after the fact. But you and I disagree with that opinion and accept the prophecy and the *story*, with all its details, as a matter of faith. There is no difference in accepting the virgin birth as a matter of faith.

The answer to the second part, whether a sign must be visible, is: Of course! There is no such thing as an invisible sign, it's a contradiction in terms. If, as the *JSB* indicates, the "sign" could be the birth of the child, then the pregnancy would be the first stage. The child's name, Imanuel ("God is with us"), is significant because it shows what God's intentions were. The birth is presupposed because an abortion would nullify the prophecy, so the completion of the pregnancy is a given. These details would be true in the original prophecy as well as in the case of Mary's pregnancy and birth.

Yakov: The Christians have made changes to the word of G-d to make it seem like Isaiah was prophesying about Jesus. Instead of translating the present tense, "is pregnant," they translate in the future tense, "will become pregnant."

Answer: This is a frequent objection raised by YouTube debaters and internet articles. The objection displays either a lack of understanding of Hebrew or willful deception.

In the first place, many Christian translations read "is pregnant" and there are Jewish translation that read "will become..."

- *Septuagint*: "Behold, a virgin *will be* with child."
- *Targum*, "Behold, a young woman *shall* conceive."
- *Tanakh JPS*, "behold, the young woman *shall* conceive."
- *New Revised Standard Version*, "Look, the young woman *is* with child."

A few other points need clarification:

- First, Matthew, like the rest of the authors of the Christian Scriptures, generally follows the Greek Septuagint (*LXX*). Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14 in the future tense, and uses the term "virgin," because that is how it is in the Greek (as above).
- A quick Hebrew lesson: Biblical Hebrew does not have past, present, and future tenses like we have in English. The Hebrew verb was either "complete" or "incomplete" (sometimes called "perfect and imperfect"). The complete state *generally* corresponds to the past tense, with exceptions. The incomplete state *generally* corresponds to the future tense, with exceptions. There are hundreds of texts where Jewish translations differ from one another as to whether a verb should be translated as a past or future tense. Jewish scholars formulated the past, present and future tenses in medieval and modern times. Here is a source where you can read up on it:
(<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/hebrew-grammar>).

This sort of thing emphasizes the need to check the validity of an objection before embracing it. Especially where an accusation of textual manipulation and translator deception is involved.

Yakov: When it says, “The young maiden” he meant that at least one of them, if not both, knew who the mother was. So how would Ahaz know that the sign has happened if this child is Jesus who was born 700 years later? The context has nothing to do with Jesus.

Answer: I agree. The context has nothing to do with the birth of Jesus.

NOTE: Yakov was surprised when we agreed that the context of Isaiah 7:14 is not referring to Jesus and cut off the conversation. He refused to consider the reasons we had prepared explaining why it was still a valid “prophecy,” even though it was *non-predictive*. So the back and forth from this point on is simulated from the notes Yakov had previously sent me.

Regarding my take on the context of Isaiah 7:14, I have not found any of the explanations that attempt to link the context of 7:14 to the virgin birth of Jesus, convincing. Even though I agree the text is taken out of its original context and applied to the virgin birth, I see no reason to discount its validity. As discussed, that was the way *prophecies* were applied in the 1st Century.¹³ The question is whether God intended for us to understand it that way or not. I believe it was.

Yakov: The sign that Isaiah was talking about is, “the two kingdoms will be desolate before the child knows to accept good [honey] and reject bad.”

Answer: This is a moot point since I agree that the context of Isaiah 7:14 does not refer to the virgin birth.

Yakov: If a mother with her child is placed in front of you, will you be able to tell if she was a virgin when she conceived?

Answer: I’ll just go out on a limb here and guess that most people would conclude that a woman was *not* a virgin when her child was conceived, and, even if she were, they would not be able to confirm it (again, just guessing). However, being able to verify Mary’s virginity when she conceived is not the issue. Joseph knew that Mary was pregnant, and he also knew that he was not the father. Since he assumed she had relations with another man he was planning to divorce her. Then, an angel appeared to him in a dream and explained how the pregnancy came about. Previously, an angel had also appeared to Mary. Angelic appearances might tend to change the normal reaction to reject the conception as having taken place without contact with a man. It did in Joseph’s case.

Conclusion: Why believe that Jesus was born of a virgin.

- The concept just makes sense, to me and to quite a few others as well. Mankind’s imperfection leading to sickness and death is a legacy stemming from man’s first parents. Imperfect man has always been incapable of extricating himself from the situation.
 - **Job 14:3** “Who can produce someone clean from someone unclean? No one can!”

- **Psalm 49:8, 9** “The ransom price for their life is so precious that it is always beyond their reach, 9 That he should live forever and not see the pit.”
 - Only a perfect human could “pay the ransom price” (a “guilt offering”) and *intercede for transgressors*. He would have to be born from a virgin who had not had contact with an imperfect man to be perfect.— See Isaiah 53:10, 12.
- **1 Corinthians 15:45** “The first man Adam became a living person.’ The last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit.”
 - Jesus, as a perfect man was equivalent to Adam, and could give his life in place of moribund mankind.
- **1 Timothy 2:6** “[Jesus] gave himself a *corresponding* ransom for all.”

I believe the account is inspired by God (just like you believe the accounts in the Tanakh).

- Joseph knew his wife was pregnant and that he was not the father.
- An angel appeared to him and told him the source of the pregnancy and Mary undoubtedly told Joseph an angel had appeared to her too.
- Matthew may have learned of the events from Mary or even from Joseph himself.
- Matthew was guided by holy spirit to recognize Isaiah 7:14 as a reference to the virgin birth.

I agree that Isaiah 7:14 was taken out of context and applied to Jesus being born of a virgin. And I believe it is rightly applied because it is one of multitudinous pieces forming the mosaic of the Messiah that God wanted people to see. The final picture is a conglomeration, a product of passages that fit together on the basis of the timing of Jesus’ appearance, who Jesus was as a person, what he did, what he taught, his judgment and execution, and his resurrection – without which Christianity would have sputtered and died as a movement.

∞ ∞ ∞

A final objection from Yakov (WhatsApp conversation):

Yakov: Isaiah 7:14 says “Look! The young woman will become pregnant.” But you can’t *look* and see that a woman has conceived.

Answer: “Look,” is a grammatical device used in Hebrew, called a “presentative,” to indicate a shift in the narrative. The Hebrew is “hineh,” and is also translated as “behold,” or “lo.”

Isaiah favors the term more than others and uses it nearly 50 times in his book.

- **Genesis 26:8** “And it came to pass, when he had been there for many days, that Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, looked out of the window, and he *saw*, and *behold* [wehineh...וַיִּהְיֶה], Isaac was jesting with Rebecca his wife.”—*Chabad*.

Here, hineh (wehineh, and behold), signals a shift in the narrative, and indicates something different to “he saw.” The king ¹looks, ²sees, and finally, ³“behold,” he grasps the reality of the situation. What Abimelech *saw* led him to understand something he hadn’t previously realized. *Rotherham’s translation* has, “and lo!”

Yakov: Modern Hebrew and English Tanakh apply the tense based on context and I believe that *Behold* “means to physically see” and not understand/ comprehend” in both Isaiah 7 & Genesis 26 based on context.

Me: Maybe I should have replied to his answer, but all I could do was shake my head. I felt like I had reached that point in the marathon where you start wondering why you’re doing it.

∞ ∞ ∞

DANIEL 9:24-27 AND THE “70 WEEKS”

Yakov curtailed our conversations before we got around to the “70 weeks” prophecy, but he had sent me extensive notes, so I knew his thoughts. Even if we had spoken, I’m guessing it would have been a brief conversation. Generally, discussions where chronology is concerned, like Daniel 9, can quickly turn into palpable examples of the law of diminishing returns. So much ink has been spilled on this prophecy based on different systems of chronology, that without agreement on the fundamentals, discussions tend to get tedious fast. Not that I ever avoided conversations about Daniel 9 while in Israel, quite to the contrary, but my focus was always on what I see as the concrete aspects of the passage rather than the calculation of “70 weeks.”

SOME INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS...

Aspects of the calculation that some have found challenging: Many have difficulty with the 490-year calculation for a few reasons: First, Daniel 9:24 says there are “70 weeks,” and then you have to explain that these are *weeks of years*: One week = 7 days = 7 years; 70 weeks = 490 days = 490 years... and with that they wrinkle their brow. Then, when you start with the math, beginning from Artaxerxes’ 20th year, their eyes begin to gloss over.¹⁴ Finally, when the calculation goes from BCE to CE, without a “0” year, they yawn. It’s an uphill battle.

Chronology in general: The chronology of ancient civilizations is difficult to pin down. Historians are dealing with events that happened thousands of years ago: In what year did so and so kill the king?... The king ruled for 42 years, but are those regnal or accession years? (Google it.)... Do the records line up with astronomical events and archeological records?... How valid are the Babylonian records for Persia and Egypt?... And so on.

All this makes for a lot of uncertainty and different points of view among historians. Surprisingly for some, there are only a few dates that all historians agree on (or *almost* all). Here are two of the most important:

- 539 BCE, Cyrus conquered Babylon. But, because some say it was 538 BCE, we may see, “538/539 BCE.”
- 14 CE, Tiberius Ceasar’s first year is universally accepted... almost. A few say it was 13 and others 15 CE.

Jewish chronology: Orthodox Judaism relies heavily on Seder Olam Rabbah; a 2nd Century CE chronological record, extending from Adam to the revolt of Bar Kokhba (quelled in 135 CE).¹⁵ The chronology is complete up to the time of Alexander the Great. Thereafter, from Alexander to Hadrian it is sparse, occupying only a small portion of the final chapter. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (article, *Seder Olam Rabbah*), “...the text here is very confused, and gave rise to various emendations.”

Seder Olam is an admirable attempt at formulating a comprehensive chronology. Who else but the rabbis would have elaborated an account of human history as it relates to the Tanakh! But it is not without flaws.

There is a discrepancy of 166 years between Seder Olam and conventional chronology, formally referred to as “the missing years.” According to the Wikipedia article, *The Missing Years*: “If traditional dates are assumed to be based on the standard Hebrew calendar, then the differing traditional and modern academic dating of events cannot both be correct. Attempts to reconcile the two systems must show one or both to have errors... The missing years not only offset the span of the Persian period, but also offset the number of years collected since the first man, Adam, walked the face of the earth.”¹⁶

A few examples of discrepancies according to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*’s article *Seder Olam Rabah*:

- Seder Olam has 422 BCE for the destruction of the First Temple (3338 Anno Mundi), against the academic dating of 586/7 BCE.
- Seder Olam has the Persian period of rulership over Jerusalem, as 34 years, but conventional chronology has the period as 207 years.
- Seder Olam says the Second Temple stood for 420 years (356 BCE to 68 CE), but conventional chronology says it stood for 587/589 years, a difference of 164/166 years.

Seder Olam’s methodological deficiencies:

- The same article in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* says, “In many cases, however, he [R. Halafta] gave the dates according to tradition, and inserted, besides, the sayings and halakot [religious rulings] of preceding rabbis and of his contemporaries.”
- Seder Olam employed a system of fitting history into a series of “Jubilees.” Many rabbis found flaws in this system (Wikipedia cites eleven): “The concept of squeezing world history from creation to Moses in 50 Jubilees and 2450 years creates serious problems with reality in the world of archeology and the general story of the Bible.”¹⁷

“Squeezing world history... in 50 jubilees,” sounds like a line from a Lewis Carroll poem: “...madly squeeze a left-hand foot into a right-hand shoe.” It’s an exercise in futility. (As a side note, Jubilees were not even a thing till Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai thousands of years after Adam, and the chronology of other nations didn’t employ them.) So, in many cases, choosing the Orthodox chronology (as set forth in Seder Olam) actually means rejecting Tanakh chronology.

Note: In order to give a thorough presentation of the Orthodox view of Daniel 9, rather than just answering Yakov’s questions, I follow the comments from articles by two rabbis; *The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9*, by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld, and *Daniel 9 - A True Biblical Interpretation*, by Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz (both on popular Jewish outreach websites).¹⁸ The articles are written in a combative “best defense is a good offence” style, similar to Martin Roth’s article on Isaiah 53, (see Addendum 3), which seems to be the norm anymore for this sort of articles. Both are admirably clear in articulating objections to the Christian view of the prophecy, but somewhat dense and less articulate when explaining Jewish chronology. Read the articles and decide for yourself.

- In his article below, R. Rosenfeld says, “As to the precise interpretation of these verses, there are a number of *slightly different approaches* among the

commentators.” If he is referring to differences between Jewish chronology and current chronology, it would be an understatement to say that Rosenfeld’s statement is an understatement.

- In spite of all the discrepancies with reliable history, and disagreements among Jewish sources surrounding Seder Olam’s chronology, R. Kravitz (below) says, “Although there appears to be a discrepancy in chronology between the Jewish and secular Gregorian calendars of 166 years (with the secular dates earlier) it is clear that Jewish record keeping is more reliable and consistent concerning these events.”

Even if we were to accept that Jewish record keeping is “more reliable,” a stretch given the advantages historians have in our day, we would still have to ask which rabbi’s records are the most reliable since, “Acceptance of Seder Olam Rabbah’s chronology was not universal,” and many rabbis formulated chronologies that contradict Seder Olam’s (Endnote 17).

The chronological discrepancies in Seder Olam with conventional dating, especially as it relates to the 70 weeks prophecy in Daniel 9, are no small matter. If anything is clear it’s this; Orthodox Judaism’s acceptance of Seder Olam as the definitive chronology of biblical history, is an act of faith. When an individual’s choice of chronology is an article of their faith, rebuttal is futile.

Christian chronology. Christians generally follow conventional chronology respecting Daniel’s prophecy, which alleviates most difficulties. Not that secular chronology is without some discrepancies; 10 years here for this event and 20 years there for that one. But nothing like the 166 year discrepancy between Jewish and secular chronologies.

For example, the lack of consensus among historians as to when Jesus was born affects the calculations in Daniel 9, presenting an obstacle in tying the 70 weeks to Jesus’ ministry and death.

Difficulty: Various dates given for Jesus’ birth.

- 6 BCE, based on Roman census and astronomical events.
- 4 BCE, based on the reign of King Herod the Great.
- 2 BCE, based on Tiberius’ accession year.

Solution: Luke 3:1, 2, specifies that John commenced his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar. Tiberius’ accession year 14 CE is one of the most widely accepted dates, so his 15th year would have been 29 CE. John, who was 6 months older than Jesus, began his ministry at that time, and Jesus began his ministry six months later when “about 30 years old” (Luke 3:23). If Jesus was 30 years old in the year 29 CE, then he was born in 2 BCE.

“It’s complicated, so is it worth discussing?”: Absolutely! There are well grounded, convincing explanations, and serious conversations can and should be engaged in. However, *arguing* about the interpretation of the 70 weeks prophecy is a fool’s errand. If someone’s faith includes belief in a particular chronology, then there is little common ground for a meaningful conversation. If someone’s point of view is similar to Yakov’s – “Don’t worry about the years as these are secular and will be off by about 165 years with the Jewish timeline” – the conversation will probably stall early on.

Now, suppose Yakov wanted to convince me that the 70 weeks (490 years) in Daniel 9 should be calculated from the destruction of the First Temple to the destruction of the Second Temple because Seder Olam calculates it that way. Yakov's confidence in Judaism's Orthodox chronology is rock solid despite many premodern rabbis finding flaws in it, despite its contradictions with parts of the Tanakh, and despite the 166-year difference with current historical calculations. For all his earnest conviction, Yakov would be hard pressed to convince me; earnest conviction is neither science nor methodology.

Aside from the calculations of the 70 weeks prophecy, there are decisive points in the prophecy that are easier to understand and more readily accepted.

Daniel 9:24-27

"Seventy weeks of years have been decreed upon your people and upon the city of your Sanctuary to terminate the transgression and to end sin, and to expiate iniquity, and to bring eternal righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint the Holy of Holies 25 And you shall know and understand that from the emergence of the word to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed king [shall be] seven weeks, and [for] sixty-two weeks it will return and be built street and moat, but in troubled times. 26 And after the sixty-two weeks, the anointed one will be cut off, and he will be no more, and the people of the coming monarch will destroy the city and the Sanctuary, and his end will come about by inundation, and until the end of the war, it will be cut off into desolation. 27 And he will strengthen a covenant for the princes for one week, and half the week he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offering, and on high, among abominations, will be the dumb one, and until destruction and extermination befall the dumb one."—*Chabad*.

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS

An overview of the Jewish interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27: According to the Rabbinic interpretation, the phrase in Daniel 9:24, "70 weeks are determined upon your people," refers to events that might, or might not, unfold depending on the repentance of the Jewish people. In other words, the Jews are given "70 weeks" (490 years) to change their ways and repent... or else.¹⁹

I quote mainly R. Kravitz for the Jewish interpretation of Daniel 9:25, 26. His comments are in parenthesis and my notes are in brackets.²⁰

- **Daniel 9:25** "Know therefore and discern that from the issuing of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (starting from its destruction) [423 BCE according to Jewish chronology] until an anointed Prince (Cyrus) will be seven weeks (49 years), [374 BCE according to Jewish chronology], and then for sixty-two weeks (434 years), it will be built again with plaza and moat but in troubled times (due to Persian, Greek, and Roman domination).
- **Daniel 9:26** Then after the sixty-two weeks [62 CE] (483 years from the destruction of the First Temple, an anointed one (sacrifices, last Jewish priest and king) will be cut off and will be no more, and the people of the prince (Romans) who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (in the 70th week, 490 years from the destruction of the First Temple)."

The final week of 7 years...

- “All three subjects [King Agrippa, the last High priest, and the sacrifices] were considered anointed and were cut off during the final week before the destruction of the Second Temple... [When the] Roman legions of Vespasian and Titus... destroyed Jerusalem. Additionally, the sacrificial system (that was anointed) ceased during this last week before the completion of the total 70 weeks of 490 years, as it says [Daniel 9:27], “during half of a week [3½ years from 65-69 CE] he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offerings. Historically during the years before the destruction of the Second Temple, the Romans set up idolatry in the Temple fulfilling the final verse in Daniel 9 that says; “upon wings of abomination shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed destruction is poured out [upon the] desolator.”

As noted, the prophecy is viewed as conditional; *if this... then that*. According to this view, since the Jews did not repent, the temple was destroyed, Messiah did not appear and, “Today’s exile is considered an extension of the Roman exile that has lasted more than 2,000 years.” In other words, if the Jews had repented, their second “exile” would have ended with the destruction of the Second Temple, the Messiah would have appeared, and the Messianic Age would have begun. (The rabbis have opposing views as to whether the Temple would have been destroyed if the Jews had repented.²¹)

Analysis of the Orthodox interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27: The rabbis’ explanations adhere to the Orthodox chronology. R. Kravitz acknowledges the 166-year discrepancy between the orthodox and secular chronologies, even as he says, “...it is clear that Jewish record keeping is more reliable and consistent concerning these events.”

At first blush the above explanation may seem compelling, however, even just a little more than a cursory inspection reveals that neither the interpretation nor the chronology are firmly rooted in the text of Daniel 9, nor are they grounded in verifiable history. (R. Kravitz’s article is quoted below unless otherwise indicated.)

Daniel 9:24 “Seventy weeks of years have been decreed upon your people and upon the city of your Sanctuary...”

Jewish view: “This prophecy also included a description of events that would unfold if the Jewish people did not repent properly.”

Objection: The Jewish interpretation begins with a difficulty. The angel Gabriel said “decreed” – mandated, determined, commanded, ordered – not *if*. There is no contingency plan attached to the *decree*; no *if this... then that*, in the sentence. Interpreting “decreed” to mean, “events that would unfold if...,” perverts what the angel actually says.

Daniel 9:25 “...from the issuing of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem...”

Jewish view: “...starting from its [Jerusalem’s] destruction,” in 423 BCE.

Objection: Beginning the prophecy from Jerusalem’s destruction is another difficulty in the Jewish explanation, a fatal one.²²

- According to modern chronology, some 657 years elapsed from the destruction of the First Temple to the destruction of the 2nd (generally 586 BCE—70 CE). But according to the Jewish calculation, 490 years elapsed between these two events (422 BCE—68 CE). That is a difference of some 166 years. Both the interpretation and the calculations are skewed from this point forward; both are irrevocably

untenable. These difficulties hang over every aspect of the Jewish interpretation like a dark cloud.

Daniel 9:25 "...until an anointed Prince will be seven weeks..."

Jewish view: The anointed Prince is "Cyrus," who conquered Babylon, "49 years" after the destruction of Jerusalem. "King Cyrus rose to power and fulfilled Jeremiah's prophesy 52 years after the destruction of Jerusalem... this is within the 7th week (49 years and before the 8th week 56 years)."

Objection: According to R. Kravitz, Cyrus conquered Babylon 49 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. This would be in 374 BCE, according to Jewish chronology (49 years after 423 BCE when the First Temple was destroyed). However, the date given is 165 years *after* the actual date of Babylon's fall in 539 BCE. The difficulty is insurmountable, and the suggestion that Cyrus is the "anointed Prince" in Daniel 9:25 is a nonstarter. No date in ancient history is more widely accepted by historians than 539 BCE.

Daniel 9:26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks..."

Jewish view: According to R. Kravitz, the 62 weeks end in 62 CE, "483 years from the destruction of the First Temple."

Objection: The thing doesn't compute; "483 years from the destruction of the First Temple," brings you to 103 BCE, an historical desert as far as any relevance to Daniel's prophecy is concerned.

Daniel 9:26 "...an anointed one will be cut off and will be no more..."

Jewish view: A few possibilities for this anointed one are offered: "sacrifices, the last Jewish priest and king."

Objection: The verse says, "an anointed one," not "ones." R. Kravitz mentions three candidates (first 3 below), but Jewish sages have suggested a few others.

- Temple Sacrifices
- Last Jewish Priest
- Agrippa, the last Jewish King (died 100 CE)
- Priests in Aaron's lineage
- Descendants of King David
- A prince or dignitary
- Titus (Roman general, conquered Jerusalem in 70 CE, died 81 CE)
- The Jewish priesthood that ended when the Temple was destroyed

Eight possibilities appear above as candidates for the "anointed one" who is "cut off." The list goes beyond 70 CE by 30 years, and includes a high priest, the priesthood, a Roman general, as well as the system of sacrifices under the Law. This is *shotgun* theology; it turns an exciting prophecy into little more than a yawn and betrays an underlying uncertainty regarding its fulfillment. The bottom line here is: "We really don't care who you pick for this "anointed one," as long as it's not Jesus!"

Daniel 9:26 "and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary."

Jewish view: Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed (by the Romans) “in the 70th week, 490 years from the destruction of the First Temple.”

Objection: The destruction of the Temple by the Romans (70 CE) occurred 655/6 years after the destruction of the First Temple, not 490 years.

Daniel 9:27 “And he will strengthen a covenant for the princes for one week.”

Jewish view: Here, R. Rosenfeld comments that, “The Romans will make a covenant of peace with the “great ones” of Israel for the final seven years.

Objection: There is no historical record of such a thing.

Daniel 9:27 “...during half of a week he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offerings...”

Jewish view: “...*the sacrificial system* (that was anointed) ceased during this last week before the completion of the total 70 weeks of 490 years, as it says [Daniel 9:27], ‘*during half of a week he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offerings.*’”

Objection: R. Kravitz’s statement is without biblical or historical support. His translation (whatever it may be) reads “...during half of a week he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offerings.” An unusual reading.

R. Rosenfeld also disagrees with R. Kravitz: “The Romans... will not abide by their covenant but for the final half a week before the Temple’s destruction they will abolish the offering of sacrifices.”

This is in line with other Jewish translations.

- **Artscroll:** “...but for half of the week he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offering...”
 - **Artscroll footnote:** “The Roman emperor would make a treaty with the Jewish nation for 7 years; but for the *second half* of that term the Romans would violate that covenant and impede the Temple service.”
- **JSB:** “...*For half a week* he will put a stop to the sacrifice and the meal offering...”
 - **JSB footnote:** “*Half a week, the three-and-a-half years* of the Maccabean revolt that had transpired to that time... *Appalling abomination*, probably new altar stones placed upon the altar in the Temple, upon which non-Jewish sacrifices were offered to foreign deities.”
 - JSB applies the prophecy to the time of Antiochus IV, rather than to the destruction of Jerusalem.
- **JPS-Tanakh:** “...and *for half of the week* he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease...”
- **Chabad:** “...and *half the week* he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offering...”
- **Alter:** “...and *for half a week* of years he shall put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering...”

Each of the 5 translations above, 2 of which are Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), agree that the sacrifice is cut off for the last half of the final week. This would be midweek, not at some random point “during” the last half of the week.

Either way, it never happened. The Romans had been expelled from Jerusalem four years before they finally destroyed the city. Without access to the city, they could not cause any sacrifices in Jerusalem to cease, midweek or otherwise.

- "...the first Jewish war against Rome (66–73 ce), which began when the Jews expelled the Romans from Jerusalem..." (*Encyclopedia Britannica, The Roman period*, 63 bce–135 ce)

The Jewish Encyclopedia details the final years of Jerusalem.²³

- "Gessius Florus (66 C.E.)... inflamed the multitude... by bringing his soldiers to Jerusalem, where they plundered the upper marketplace and robbed many houses; though in the end he was forced to retire again to Cæsarea..."
- "Cestius Gallus... burned the new city Bezetha, stormed the inner wall, and had commenced to undermine the Temple wall when he was repulsed [also 66 CE]."
- "Under Vespasian (70) was commenced the great siege of Jerusalem, which lasted from the 14th of Nisan until the 8th of Elul, 134 days... Vespasian was succeeded by his son Titus, who came with four legions..."
- "...on the eighty-fourth [3 weeks before Jerusalem was destroyed], the daily sacrifice in the Temple was stopped..."
- "...on the ninety-fifth, the northern cloisters of the Temple were destroyed; on the one hundred and fifth, fire was set to the Temple... finally, the greater part of the city went up in flames."
- "The Jews commemorate the Ninth of Ab as the day of the destruction of the Temple, though this seems to have taken place on the 10th of the month..."

NOTE: The daily sacrifice at the Temple was discontinued 3 weeks before it was destroyed.

- When the daily sacrifice finally ceased, the Romans had no hand in it.²⁴
- The Romans did not make a covenant of peace with Jerusalem's leaders 7 years before Jerusalem was destroyed.

The rabbis' explanation of this passage resides in the realm of myth and wishful thinking... untethered to either the biblical text or historical reality. For R. Kravitz to preface his explanation with, "*Historically...*," is chutzpah. (He knows it's not true, he looks right at you and winks when he says it... you have to like this guy!)

Daniel 9:27 "upon wings of abomination shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed destruction is poured out [upon the] desolator."

Jewish view: "Historically during the years before the destruction of the second Temple, the Romans set up idolatry in the Temple fulfilling the final verse."

Objection: There is no historical basis for the above statement. The Romans only desecrated the Temple shortly before destroying it in 70 CE, and not "during the years before the destruction." Furthermore, they did not have access to Jerusalem from 66 CE until they entered the city in 70 CE. Thirty years earlier, Caligula had planned on erecting his statue in the Temple, but "countermanded this potentially disastrous order." (*Brittanica*, article *Caligula*) So, what is the rabbi referring to?

Daniel 9:27 "upon wings of abomination shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed destruction is poured out [upon the] desolator."

Jewish view: R. Rosenfeld: “Also, an idolatrous temple with mute [dumb] abominations would later be built on the high place of the Temple (by Hadrian) – until destruction will be poured out upon all such abominations in the End of Days.”

According to *Artscroll's* note on 9:27: “...[the Roman Emperor] would violate that covenant and impede the Temple service. The ‘mute abomination,’ i.e., a temple of idolatry, was erected by emperor Hadrian on the Temple Mount (Rashi).”

Objection: Hadrian's sacrifice on the ruins of the Temple occurred 60 years after the Temple was destroyed, so it can hardly be linked to Daniel's prophecy. Daniel 9:27 is clear, “[desolation] until the decreed destruction is poured out,” which occurred in 70 CE. Citing Hadrian as fulfilling some aspect of the prophecy long *after* Jerusalem's destruction is a disingenuous attempt to give credence to a biblically unjustifiable time frame.

If *Artscroll's* comment is not read carefully, one could conclude that Hadrian was the Roman Emperor who impeded the Temple service, which, of course, could not be the case since he lived six decades after Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE.

In the end, the Jewish interpretation trivializes Daniel's prophecy. Viewing it as if it were a contingency plan turns the passage into much ado about nothing: “It's a nice thought that didn't materialize.” The term “anointed one” is minimized by insisting there were two of them, and by postulating that the second anointed one may have been killed because he was a bad actor. None of that detracts from the fact that something of monumental historical significance had to occur to someone known as an anointed one, *mashiach*, before the destruction of the Second Temple. This is made clear at the outset of the prophecy and these facts are impervious to all objections.

Deciphering the Jewish explanation: The rabbis who formulated Seder Olam's chronology, based their calculations on the premise that the starting point of the prophecy's 70 weeks was the destruction of the First Temple and ended with the destruction of the second. They calculated Jerusalem's destruction as 68 CE, (nearly correct) and, from that point, they simply counted backwards 490 years to arrive at the date the First Temple was destroyed; 422/423 BCE. That gave them a framework in which to fit the three periods of the 70 weeks: 7 weeks, 62 weeks and 1 week. They did the best they could with the tools they had at hand, but their calculations were doomed from the beginning because they were based on a false theological premise rather than an academic quest for accurate dates. Concluding on erroneous religious grounds that the 70 weeks (490 years) ran from the destruction of one Temple to the destruction of other, led them to come up 166 years short.

Had they not forced an invalid assumption on the text, they might have nailed it, or at least gotten much closer. But that would have meant accepting that the period of 483 years ended decades before the destruction of Jerusalem, and this would have forced them to conclude that the final 7-year week also occurred long before 70 CE. Then they would have had to give a very different explanation for the midweek suspension of the “sacrifice and meal-offering.” But all those adjustments would have been precariously similar to the Christian interpretation and that was something the rabbis were not prepared to allow.

Orthodox Jewry, out of deep respect, has adopted the chronology of their sages as a matter of faith and told the community of believers that the Rabbinic “calculations are

more reliable than those of secular historians.” That is palpably not the case today with so many more ancient sources available, archeological discoveries, and the possibility of comparing different sources via the internet. The community of the faithful may say *amen* to the idea that the “rabbis knew best,” but many outside that community are less indulgent and prefer something a little more compelling than, “trust us, we’re rabbis and we know.”

Rabbis like Rosenfeld and Kravitz are obliged to walk a tightrope when writing their articles. They need to present information that has the appearance of being fact-based, but without veering from orthodox doctrine. So, they hype the prowess of the 2nd Century rabbis, stick to orthodox interpretations, play fast and loose with history, and omit pertinent information. All the while, downplaying the deficiencies of their data with phrases like, “there appears to be a discrepancy of 166 years,” – which may be one of my all-time favorite understatements – and accusing Christians of “mistranslations and misinterpretations.” They know the best defense is a good offense, so they come out swinging. They also know that no one is Jewish because of orthodox chronology, and no one abandons Judaism for doubting it. So, with much to gain and little to lose, they fudge a bit. And anyway, “Who’s gonna care?”

An overview of the Christian interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27: The passage is a prophecy about the appearance and death of the Messiah before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Christians see fulfillment of the prophecy in the person of Jesus.

Basic time factor: “Seventy weeks are decreed upon thy people and upon thy holy city.” (Daniel 9:24) Both Christians and Jews understand that the “70 weeks” refer to 490 years. Some Jewish translations (*Chabad*, above, and *Alter*) translate “70 weeks of years.”

A unique prophecy: Four factors of the prophecy prevent false interpretations and make it unique:

1. The time factor: Any interpretation must occur within a definite time frame.
2. The prophecy’s introduction: It must be spectacular, something truly noteworthy.
3. The “messiah,” reference: The interpretation must include *the anointed one/messiah*.
4. Messiah’s death *before* the destruction of the Second Temple: Any interpretation must include the death of the messiah before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

These four factors are like a 4-digit combination lock, designed to lock out counterfeit interpretations. If one factor is missing, the interpretation fails. Only the true interpretation could satisfy all four factors.

Take the most popular interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 as an example; the assault of Antiochus IV on Jerusalem and the assassination of the Jewish High Priest Onias III. 1 and 2 Maccabees, historical writings included in Catholic Bibles, recount that the Syrian ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes massacred thousands of Jews for rebelling against him (168 BCE) and built an “abomination of desolation.” By sacrificing swine on “God’s altar” Antiochus had committed an “abomination.” Three years later, the Jewish High Priest, Onias III, was assassinated. Eventually the Jews threw off the Syrian yoke and rededicated the Temple. This looks like a slam dunk as far as fulfillments are concerned. (Orthodox Judaism does not support this view, as explained above.)

In favor of the Antiochus IV interpretation: Pigs were sacrificed on “God’s altar” – an “abomination of desolation,” (1 Maccabees 1:54, a reference to Daniel 9:27) – there was the death of the High Priest – “an anointed one” – and the rededication of the Second Temple – an anointing of the “Holy of Holies.” The timeframe fits since it is well within the 490-year period that was “decreed.”

Close, but no cigar: Daniel’s prophecy has built-in constraints that rule out the Antiochus interpretation.

- An “anointed one,” Onias III was killed, but who has ever heard of him outside of history buffs, scholars and rabbis? After the death of Onias III, the Hasmoneans became so corrupt that they were considered worse than the Syrians. So, in what way is Onias III connected with *finishing off transgression, the end of sin, and eternal righteousness*?
- The “city *and* the Temple” were ravaged by Antiochus IV, but they were not destroyed as indicated in the prophecy.—Daniel 9:26.

The constraints built into the 70 weeks prophecy effectively rule out the above interpretation.

The Christian view of Daniel 9:24-27 (followed by Jewish objections)

Daniel 9:24-27 “To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to forgive iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal vision and prophet, and to anoint the most holy place.”

- **The dramatic introduction:** No other prophecy begins with such lofty terminology; it is unparalleled in the Scriptures.
 - “To finish the transgression” ... A world where worshipers of God live according to his laws and moral code.
 - “An end of sin” ... Immorality, hatred, violence, are absent among God’s people.
 - “Everlasting righteousness” ... The above conditions would prevail *forever*.
 - And so on....
- Taking all six objectives into account, it is clear that this prophecy is unique, and any interpretation would have to be something truly spectacular.

Objection 1: “This prophecy... included a description of events that would unfold *if* the Jewish people did not repent properly.”

Answer: Daniel 9:24-27 is a *prophecy*, not a contingency plan.

Objection 2: “The Hebrew term (קֹדֶשׁ קְדוֹשִׁים) means ‘holy of holies,’ the innermost compartment of the Temple, and it is incorrect to translate it ‘most holy one,’ as some Christian Bibles do, to make it seem refer to the Messiah rather than a place.”

Answer: The rabbi is right! “Most holy one” is a tendentious translation. However, out of the 38 Christian translations I examined, only 5 translated the expression as above (2 Catholic, 1 protestant, and 2 English translations of the 2nd Century Aramaic Peshitta). On the other side of the coin, *The Good News Bible* translates the phrase as “the holy Temple will be *rededicated*.” This is also inaccurate, but it falls on the side of the Antiochus IV interpretation and the rededication of the Temple in 165 BCE.

Daniel 9:25 "...from the emergence of the *word* to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem..."

- **The starting point of Daniel's prophecy:** The countdown of the 70 weeks, 490 years, began when the "word," *decree/order*, to restore and rebuild Jerusalem was given. (Nehemiah 2:1-6) The decree was issued in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, 455 BCE, not when the Temple was destroyed.²⁵

Objection 1: "The Christian major error in establishing the starting point of Daniel's prophecy is caused by their mistranslation of Daniel 9:25... the original Hebrew used the word (דבר ~ Devar)... [which] refers to a prophetic word... not a human decree."

Answer: The objection is misstated, the definition of "davar" is misleading, and information is withheld.²⁶ "Davar" can refer either to a *divine* or *human* decree. The four passages below, from the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) *Chabad* translation, translates the term *davar* two times to refer to decrees from Moses (which some may consider *divine*), and two times to refer to human decrees.

- **Exodus 12:35** And the children of Israel did according to Moses' *order* [davar-מִשְׁחָה]
- **Leviticus 10:7** And they did according to Moses' *order* [davar-מִשְׁחָה]."
- **Esther 1:12** "But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's *behest* [davar-בְּדִבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ]."
- **Esther 1:19** If it please the king, let a royal *edict* go forth from before him [davar-מִלְכוּתִי]."²⁷
 - Though *davar* literally means *word*, it can be synonymous with an order, behest, edict and other appropriate terms like decree, command, etc. More to the point, the above texts leave no doubt that *davar* can refer to either divine or human decrees. To allege otherwise is a fabrication.

Objection 2: "[Christians] incorrectly assume that the *decree* of King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1-6) is the starting point of the prophecy..."

Answer: There are three reasons for identifying Artaxerxes' decree as the fulfillment of Daniel 9:25.

1. The language in Nehemiah 2:3-6 refers to the *restoration* and *rebuilding* of Jerusalem which mirrors Daniel 9:25.

Daniel 9:25	Nehemiah 2:3, 5, 6, 18
"From the issuance of the word to <i>restore</i> and <i>rebuild Jerusalem</i> ..."	"And I said to the king, 'May the king live forever! Why should my countenance not be sad when <i>the city [Jerusalem]... is laid waste</i> , and its gates are consumed by fire?'... 'If it pleases the king... <i>send me to Judah...so that I may rebuild it</i> ' ²⁸ ... 6 So it pleased the king to send me... 18 And <i>I went on to tell them</i> of the hand of my God, how it was good upon me, and also of <i>the king's words</i> that he had said to me." ²⁹

Nehemiah 2:1-8 "And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king... 2 So the king said to me: 'Why is your face gloomy when you yourself are not sick?'... 3 Then I said to the king... 'Why should not my face become gloomy when *the city*, the house of the burial places of my forefathers, *is devastated, and its very gates have been eaten up with fire*?' 4 In turn the king said to me: 'What is this that you are seeking to secure?'... 5 I said to *the king*..."

'send me to Judah, to the city of the burial places of my forefathers, *that I may rebuild it.*' 6 At this the king said to me, as his queenly consort was sitting beside him: 'How long will your journey come to be and when will you return?' So it seemed good before the king that he should send me... 7 And I went on to say to the king... 'let letters be given me... 8 to build with timber the gates of the Castle that belongs to the house, and for the wall of the city and for the house into which I am to enter.' So the king gave [them] to me, according to the good hand of my God upon me... 18 And I went on to tell them of the hand of my God, how it was good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had said to me. At this they said: "Let us get up, and we must build."

2. The "word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" was issued at this time. The king also wrote letters, a decree, to that effect. Nehemiah later referred to this, in verse 18 above, as the King's words, plural of *davar* (similar to Exodus 12:35; Leviticus 10:7; Esther 1:12 and Esther 1:19 above). So, here is when "the word [*davar*] to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem," was issued, and the clock began ticking on Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks, 490 years.

3. Alternatives are lacking. The official Orthodox calculation of the prophecy's starting point is off by 166 years, and the biblical basis for the chronology is erroneous. What reasonable alternative to Artaxerxes's 20th year as the prophecy's starting point is there? Some may ignore this reality because of their faith in the calculations of 2nd Century rabbis, but facts don't just vanish into thin air because someone is not inclined to acknowledge them.

Objection 3: "With four different proclamations [regarding Jerusalem], there is no historical justification to choose the one mentioned in Nehemiah 2."

Answer: There are numerous decrees regarding Jerusalem, and the fact is irrelevant as an objection. Ezra 1:1-4, is a decree granting the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Ezra 6:12-13 and Ezra 7:11-16 are similar decrees regarding the Temple. On the other hand, Artaxerxes' decree in Nehemiah 2:1-8 is different to all the others in that it specifically refers to the *restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem*, not to the Jews' return and building the Temple. This is the only decree or proclamation – *word* – that fits the prophecy's starting point.

Objection 4: "...the Hebrew word (דבר ~ *Devar*) in both Daniel 9:25 and Daniel 9:2 also establishes that they share the same beginning point, the destruction of Jerusalem."

Answer: Neither passage refers to the *destruction* of Jerusalem. Daniel 9:2 refers to Israel's forthcoming return to Jerusalem after 70 years of Babylonian domination.

- **Daniel 9:2** "...I, Daniel, consulted the books concerning the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD that had come to Jeremiah the prophet, were to be the term of Jerusalem's desolation—seventy years."—*JSB*.
 - **Jeremiah 25:11** "This whole land shall be a desolate ruin. And those nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (See also, Jeremiah 29:10; 2 Chronicles 36:21.)

R. Kravitz further alleges the following, “Daniel... wanted to know when the destruction would end with the building of the second Temple.” The rabbi is saying that Daniel 9:2 refers to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. And he offers a novel translation of Daniel 9:2 to support this idea, “I Daniel contemplated the calculations, the number of years about that which the word of God came to the prophet Jeremiah, to complete the 70 years to the destruction of Jerusalem.”

The rabbi’s translation, whatever it may be, is not accurate as can be seen when compared with the following Jewish translations, two of which are Haredi (all in agreement with the *JSB* above):

Artscroll: “...to complete the seventy years *since* the ruin of Jerusalem.”

Chabad: “...the number of the years that the word of the Lord had come to Jeremiah the prophet, *since* the destruction of Jerusalem seventy years.”

Leeser: “...the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord had come to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would *let pass full seventy years over the ruins of Jerusalem*.”

Alter “...the number of years that according to the word of the LORD that to Jeremiah the prophet were to *fulfill the devastations of Jerusalem—seventy years*.”

Daniel 9:25 is a prophetic declaration referring to future events rather than the present.

- **Daniel 9:25** And you shall know and understand that *from the emergence of the word to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed king* [shall be] seven weeks, and [for] sixty-two weeks it will return and be built street and moat, but in troubled times.

So, Daniel 9:2 is focused on the imminent end of Israel’s 70-year exile, and Daniel 9:25 looks farther ahead to the starting point of the 70 weeks and the appearance of the “anointed king.” Both texts are focused on future events that are unrelated to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Objection 5: Christians calculate the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel, 490 years, as 360-year days, which they term a “prophetic year.” The problem is that the Jewish calendar, and Scripture, knows nothing of a 360-day year.³⁰

“One Christian attempt [for calculating a 360-day day year]... is from the New Testament: ‘They will tread underfoot the holy city for 42 months, and they will prophesy for 1260 days.’ (Revelation 11:2-3)... By dividing 1260 (days) by 42 (months) you get 30 days per month, they claim that each month is 30 days, and a Prophetic Biblical year would therefore be 360 days (30x12=360). An additional proof-text utilizes the events surrounding the flood. The following verses are quoted to show how biblical months were periods of 30 days, ‘the water prevailed upon the earth 150 days,’ Gen 7:24, and the flood started on, ‘the 17th day of the second month,’ Gen 7:11, and ended on, ‘the 17th day of the seventh month.’ Gen 8:4. They argue that by taking this exact 5-month period and dividing it into 150 days you will see that there must be 5 months of 30 days each and therefore a year would be 360 days... [they] manipulate their calculation of the 69 weeks in Daniel 9 in an attempt to have them coincide with the arrival and death of Jesus in Jerusalem... This line of reasoning is absolutely false and simply an act of desperation.”

Answer: The rabbi states the Christian reasoning admirably well, but his objection leaves a lot out. According to the rabbi, using Revelation as a basis for the “prophetic year” is objectionable, but why? It was written by a Jew without any relation to the book of Daniel. Moreover, Revelation is in the genre of “apocalyptic” literature, the same as Daniel, parts of Ezekiel, and some non-biblical Hebrew writings.

The reference to Noah’s logbook in Genesis is also rejected as “absolutely false,” but again, we are left in the dark as to why. It seems fine to me... it’s Genesis, it’s Jewish, and the math works. So why not?

Finally, he says, “The fabricated ‘prophetic year’ of 360 days could not exist because it would not allow Jewish holidays to coincide with both months and seasons.” But Daniel’s prophecy is only concerned with getting from point A to point B, not with Jewish festivals. There was no reason why the calculation needed to take these into account.

Daniel 9:25, 26 “...from the emergence of the word to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed king...”

- **The Messiah:** This is the only place in the Tanakh where the promised anointed one/messiah is mentioned directly in prophecy. Any interpretation of the prophecy would have to include the Messiah. In spite of attempts to play down the importance of the term “anointed one/messiah,” that is the word that is used, and this is a prophecy.

Objection 1: “In verses 25, 26 there is no definite article (Hey ~ ה) before the word (משיח~ Moshiach) and it is incorrect to translate this as ‘**the** anointed one,’ as if it were speaking about one exclusive individual.”

Answer: *Chabad’s* translation above reads, “**the** anointed king.” It would be naïve to think the rabbi is not aware that *Chabad* has the definite article “the,” in front of “anointed one.” This is dealt with further in the “Answer” to Yakov.

Objection 2: “(משיח~ Moshiach/mashiah) means ‘anointed’ not ‘Messiah.’ Even in Christian translations, the word Moshiach is translated 99% of the time as ‘anointed.’ The only exception is twice in Daniel 9 verses 25 and 26... Therefore, in Daniel [9:25] the passages should be correctly translated as... ‘Until an anointed prince’ and not as ‘Until Messiah the prince’... this is a blatant and intentional mistranslation of the Hebrew word (משיח ~ Moshiach).” Furthermore, the *JSB* says, “The word anointed in vv. 25 and 26 is the Heb ‘mashiah’ (Messiah); thus these vv. have given rise to much Christian speculation... In the Bible, ‘mashiah’ never refers to the future ideal Davidic king... This use is postbiblical.”

NOTE: I confess... I added the *JSB* quote because the rabbi’s argument seemed a little anemic.

Answer: First, let’s clear the air: Translating “Messiah” is not a “blatant and intentional *mistranslation*,” it is a blatant and intentional *translation*. Translating “the *Messiah*” is fully justified.³¹ More on this below, in my “Answer” to Yakov.

Notice that the *JSB* has no objection to “Messiah” on grammatical grounds, nor do they object to capitalizing it: “The word anointed in vv. 25 and 26 is the Heb

‘mashiah’ (Messiah).” For the *JSB*, *Messiah* is unwarranted because, “In the Bible, ‘mashiah’ never refers to the future ideal Davidic king; this use is postbiblical.” But is that the case? The term “anointed one/mashiah” is used prophetically in reference to a king appointed by God, even *before* Israel had a king.

- **1 Samuel 2:10** “He [God] will give power to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed one [משיח~ mashiach].”
 - The Targum translates the final phrase of 2:10 as, “he shall multiply the kingdom of the Messiah.”

On the other hand, shouldn’t the focus be on what God desired his worshipers to understand by the term “mashiach?” The context of Daniel 9 should be the deciding factor of whether the passage is a messianic prophecy or not.

Daniel 9:25: “...until the anointed king... [shall be] seven weeks, and [for] sixty-two weeks...”

- **The Messiah appears in 29 CE** after 69 weeks, 483 years.

Objection: “An additional mistake made by Christians is the translation of 7 and 62 weeks as one undivided unity of 69 weeks... as if the arrival and ‘cutting off’ of the ‘Messiah’ will take place sixty-nine weeks (483 years) after a decree to restore Jerusalem. They add the 7 and 62 weeks together and have one person (the Messiah) and two events occurring towards the end of the 69th week. Actually, according to the Hebrew, the 7 and 62 weeks are two separate and distinct periods. One event happens after 7 weeks and another event after an additional 62 weeks. The correct translation should be, ‘until an anointed prince shall be 7 weeks (49 years), ‘then for 62 weeks (434 years) it (Jerusalem) will be built again but in troubled times.’ Then after the 62 weeks shall an anointed one will be cut off.’ ‘Seven weeks and sixty-two’ means two events, one at 7 weeks and the other 62 weeks later, not one event after a cumulative 69 weeks.”

Answer: The objection attempts to becloud the issue. Even if there were two “anointed” ones, the overall timing of the 70 weeks would not change, and the second anointed one would still be on the scene when the prophecy indicated he should be. The important factor, from the Christian standpoint, is that Jesus was on the scene in Jerusalem within the 70 weeks’ timeframe. As R. Rosenfeld points out, “The second anointed one... did live around the time of Jesus...” That is a tacit admission that Jesus was on the scene in the timeframe stipulated in Daniel 9:25. So, even from a Jewish perspective, Jesus could be the (so-called) “second anointed one.” In the end, the argument over punctuation has no bearing on the question of Jesus’ messiahship since it does not affect the overall timing of the prophecy.

Daniel 9:26: “And... an anointed one [shall] be cut off, and be no more; and the people of a prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.”

- **The Messiah is “cut off,”** he dies, *before* the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE.

Objection 1: Interestingly the Hebrew word (kares ~ כרת) translated as “cut off,” biblically refers to someone who has sinned so grievously that they are put to death by heavenly decree as a divine punishment for their own transgressions.

Answer: The idea is that Jesus, supposedly sinless, could not be the anointed one in verse 26 who was “cut off” for unrighteousness. The objection is baseless and betrays a lack of biblical knowledge, or worse... but I will reserve my comments for the “Answer” to Yakov.

Objection 2: Daniel states that that this *mashiach* will be cut off “and there will not be to him” (“*v’ain lo*”)... Christians interpret this expression as meaning “he will die but not for his own sake,” namely, the Messiah will die for our sins. But that is simply not what the Hebrew means.

Answer: The rabbi makes a valid point. Some Christian translations do have, “die but not for his own sake,” which seems indefensible to me. However, most Christian translations say, “have nothing,” “with nothing for himself,” or something in line with other Jewish translations that can also be quite interpretive.

- **Leeser:** “...an anointed one be cut off without a successor to follow him.”
- **Chabad:** “...the anointed one will be cut off, and he will be no more.”
- **Alter:** the anointed one shall be cut off with none to save him.”
- **JSB:** the anointed one will disappear and vanish.”

Daniel 9:27 “And he will strengthen a covenant for the princes for one week...”

- **The final week of 7 years:** The privilege of being accepted into the New Covenant was offered only to the Jews for a period of seven years; from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in 29 CE to 36 CE (that is, for three and a half years after his death). The 70 weeks ended in 36 CE, and Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed 34 years later.
- “covenant for the princes” can also be translated, “for [the] many,” referring to the Jews.
 - **JSB:** “During one week he will make a firm covenant with many.”
 - **Alter:** “And he shall make a strong pact with the many for one week of years.”

Objection: “...the final week [is] before the destruction of the Second Temple [in 70 CE]...”

Answer: The destruction of Jerusalem took place 34 years after the final “week” of the prophecy had concluded, not in 63 CE, 7 years prior to the city’s destruction in 70 CE.

Daniel 9:27 “...and half the week he will abolish sacrifice and meal-offering.”

- **The sacrifice ceases midweek:** Jesus’ death occurred *midweek*, three and a half years after he began his ministry. His death, a ransom sacrifice for mankind, replaced the sacrifices under the Mosaic Law. Those sacrifices were “abolished” as far as God was concerned, having been replaced by the greater, and more encompassing sacrifice, of Jesus’ own life.

Objection: “... for the final half a week before the Temple’s destruction they [the Romans] will abolish the offering of sacrifices.”

Answer: As above, the Romans were expelled from Jerusalem in 66 CE, and only entered in 70 CE when they destroyed the city and Temple. They were not responsible for the cessation of the Temple sacrifices “midweek,” or any other time.

NOTE ON EPITHETS: Liberally peppered throughout their articles, the rabbis refer to the Christian position and translations as: bold manipulations, fabrications, mistranslations, desperation, counting backwards, and... of course, the ever present line, “according to the Hebrew...”

I agreed with the rabbis when their accusations had merit. But let's not imagine that Christians have a monopoly on fabrications, manipulations, desperate arguments and misstating the Hebrew.

For example, Christians are accused of *counting backwards* to make the beginning of Jesus' ministry and his death line up with Daniel's prophecy. And I happen to agree with the accusation, they did it... and so what? The rabbis also counted backwards from the destruction of the Second Temple in order to calculate the date of the destruction of the First Temple. They came up with 422/423 BCE and botched it by 166 years. Not that counting backwards was blameworthy on their part, but the wrongheaded basis for when the calculation of 70 weeks (490 years) should begin caused an error so great that it garnered the official designation of “the missing years.” Wasn't that **manipulation**?

The chronology formulated by the rabbis in the 2nd Century (Seder Olam), was born out of dire necessity, or rather, various necessities. The Temple had been destroyed, the entire Jewish system of sacrifices disrupted, and the priesthood terminated. An explanation for all this was needed, and it had to be a good one. Interpreting Daniel's prophecy gave them the opportunity they desperately needed. As Historian Schurer said, “...the Messianic hope received an entirely new colouring in later times... [the scribes] worked at and settled in detail the whole circle of religious ideas, and especially the Messianic expectations. Thus the poetic picture became learned dogma.” (See Endnote 56.) This was done around 200 CE.

By placing the final week of 7 years just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, they effectively removed Jesus from the prophecy's timeframe and from messianic consideration. Then, by placing the blame for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on the shoulders of the Jewish nation for not repenting, they had an explanation of why the messiah did not appear, and why the “exile” of the Jews continued after 70 CE. This had the double benefit of being a call to repentance as well as a timeless reminder of the consequences of not returning to Torah. And, not to be overlooked, the interpretation had the added benefit of explaining why the Jews were still God's chosen people despite the Temple's destruction and despite all their woes. The rabbinic interpretation of Daniel that arose from that **act of desperation** was nothing less than absolute genius!

(In retrospect, the explanation may have served the immediate needs of the Jewish people, but it has never motivated them to repent and return to Torah.)

And what about the ever present, **according to the Hebrew**; the accusation of mistranslations? I have dealt with each of the accusations of mistranslation in this article. Two out of eight (numbers 1 and 7) are valid, but the rest of the accusations are either half-truths or just false and none of them invalidate the Christian translation or the Christian position.³²

So, yes, sometimes accusations regarding translation are justified... but that works both ways. There are too many incidents where Jewish translations say the same as

Christian translations for the rabbis not to be aware of it. And too many occasions where they make a big deal out of a grammatical issue that they know is a non-issue; like the definite article in front of “anointed one,” the expression “cut off,” and the Hebrew “davar/word,” etc.

When interpretations are formulated with a specific end in view, facts are also fabricated out of necessity. And these abound in the rabbis’ assertions.

- They suggest that Agrippa II might be the “anointed one” that was cut off, even though he died in 100 CE, 30 years after the destruction of Jerusalem.³³
- They say Hadrian fulfilled Daniel 9:27, even though his actions regarding Jerusalem and the Temple occurred 60 years after their destruction.
- They assert that the Romans broke their pact with the Jewish leaders at *midweek* (after 3½ years) and set up idolatrous worship in the Temple, even though the Romans had been expelled from Jerusalem before that time and the daily sacrifice ceased 3 weeks before the Romans destroyed the Temple.
- The entire rabbinic chronological framework is irremediably flawed and constructed on an erroneous religious interpretation.

The rabbis must know that the Romans did not break a pact after being expelled from Jerusalem, mustn’t they? They’re certainly aware that Agrippa II was not killed during the siege of Jerusalem, right? Is it possible they never read that Hadrian lived way outside the 490 years?” Are they that impassioned that they cannot see they are guilty of what they accuse others of doing? Have they no mirrors?

Their lack of self-awareness reminds me of the Bob Dylan line from *My Back Pages*, “In a soldier’s stance, I aimed my hand, at the mongrel dogs who teach, fearing not I’d become my enemy, in the instant that I preach.”

Don’t get me wrong, I believe these are good and knowledgeable men. But they are definitely not dispassionate scholars. They are, first and foremost, rabbis on a mission to “save the souls of their Jewish brothers and sisters,” and they will do it... by hook or by crook, or whatever else it takes.

For them, or anyone, to imagine that false information would *liberate* their fellow believers is misguided... lies only enslave, never liberate. As Jesus said, “The *truth* will set you free.”—John 8:32.

ANSWERING YAKOV’S QUESTIONS ON DANIEL 9

NOTE: Yakov’s notes contained a long list of questions; some were incisive, others not so much. I chose the more challenging questions, those reflecting the rabbis’ articles I have been referring to, as well as those objections most common on YouTube videos and Jewish outreach websites. Even though most of my answers to Yakov are simulated, *as if* we were writing to each other (apart from a brief WhatsApp back and forth), the questions are all his, from his notes.

Yakov: The two times that “*mashiach*” appears here [verses 25 and 26], Christians translate it as “*the* Messiah,” with the definite article (which does not appear in the Hebrew), and with the word Messiah capitalized – although Hebrew has no capital letters.

NOTE: This objection, mentioned in both of the rabbis' articles, and so frequent on Jewish websites, is frivolous... annoyingly so. Not that I'm averse to objections, some are serious and challenging and that is fair enough. But this one is silly, it's tiresome, it's time consuming and those raising the objection, at least the mouthpieces for it, know it's ridiculous and are merely throwing mud against the wall to see if something sticks. Others, like Yakov, are parroting what they have picked up somewhere. Anyway, I'll answer it... begrudgingly. The reason for my frustration should become clear from the get-go.

The allegation is twofold: 1) Christians translate "the Messiah," even though there is no definite article before the word "mashiach." 2) Christians capitalize "Messiah," even though Hebrew is written without caps. Both allegations are true, and both are still nonsense.

The definite article issue:

- **Chabad** 9:25 the anointed king 26 the anointed one.
- **Artscroll** 9:25 the anointment of the prince 26 an anointed one.
- **Leeser** 9:25 the anointed the prince 26 an anointed one.
- **Tanakh-JPS** 9:25 the anointed leader 26 the anointed one.
- **Alter** 9:25 the anointed prince 26 the anointed one.

All five translations have "the" in verse 25, and three out of the five have "the" in verse 26. Now, you might be wondering why these Jewish translations, two of which are Haredi, have "the," in the majority of cases when there is no definite article at this point in Hebrew. If so, write and ask them.

In general terms, we have to understand that grammar is non-transferable from one language to another – English is not Hebrew (and vice versa). The translator's task is to produce accurate translations that are grammatically correct in the language they are translating into (target language). To do this, they continually make judgement calls in ambiguous cases. (I know this firsthand from working in translation for several years.) This should be obvious; imagine English translations from a Hebrew text *without* capital letters and, conversely, Hebrew translations from English *with* capital letters.

Capitalization: If the translator feels that the definite article is justified before a noun, as in the Jewish translations above, then why not capitalize the noun? In English, "the" in front of "anointed one," can also be written as, "the **A**nointed One," or "the **M**essiah," since "*mashiach*" can be translated as anointed one or messiah. The grammatical dictates of the target language determine the translator's decisions in many cases.

The only way that the proponents of Yakov's objection would not know the above information is if they only read Christian translations and were clueless regarding translation basics. Of course, if that is the case, they shouldn't be writing articles. But, hey, this is the world we live in.

Yakov: The word "cut off" (Hebrew, "kareth,") is used in Daniel 9:26 which has a negative connotation, being cut off because of sin. How can the term *cut off* be attributed to Jesus? Here are all the passages that use the word kareth in Tanakh and clearly it shows that the person is being cut off from being a part of Israel and not being crucified on the cross: Exodus 12:15; Leviticus 17:14; Numbers 9:13; Psalm 37:28; Hosea 8:4.

Answer: The objection is wrong on two counts: A righteous person can be “cut off,” and your list is incomplete.

- The “anointed one” who was “cut off,” in Daniel 9:26, is applied by many to High Priest Onias III (explained above). The *Jewish Encyclopedia* says, “He [Onias III] is described as a pious man.”—2 Maccabees 4:34.
- Though Yakov says he has listed all the passages with “kareth,” he missed a couple.
 - **Isaiah 53:8, 9** “For he [the Servant] was *cut off* from the land of the living... 9 although he had done no wrong and there was no deception in his mouth.”
 - **Jeremiah 11:19** “I am like a choice sheep led to the slaughter; I did not know that they devised schemes against me: ‘Let us destroy [him by placing] tree-poison in his food and *cut him off* from the land of the living, so that his name will not be remembered anymore...”—*Chabad*.
 - **Artscroll’s footnote** on Jeremiah 11:19 says: “Jeremiah’s townspeople plotted to kill him for his constant rebukes and prophecies of doom.”

It is doubtful that Yakov came up with the above objection and the list of texts on his own. Not being a Hebrew speaker, he would have lifted them off some website like Jewsforjudaism.com. But when rabbis push this bogus objection, knowing that the term is used in reference to righteous individuals, along with a list of texts they falsely tout as “complete,” it is a different matter. They are knowingly withholding information, and at the same time, presenting half-truths. This is naughty.

To be clear, none of this proves that Jesus is the Messiah. But I’d think twice before buying a car from these guys if I were you.

Yakov: If Daniel predicted the exact year when Jesus was to be crucified, why is this not mentioned in the Greek text? May I suggest that this is a more recent revelation that Christians have had through the holy spirit.

Answer: Good one. Daniel’s calculation regarding the timing of the messiah’s death is not mentioned in the Christian Scriptures. But, if the Christian Scriptures had mentioned Daniel 9:26, 27 in relation to Jesus’ death, would today’s anti-missionaries accept that Jesus is the Messiah and renounce Judaism? Would you, Yakov? (I have my reservations on that one.) My guess is they would allege that the information was added to the Christian scriptures at a later date, just as they do regarding references in the Christian Scriptures to the Servant passage in Isaiah 52/53.³⁴ “Just another example of blatant Christian manipulation and mistranslation.”

So, the fact that Daniel 9 is not mentioned in relation to the timing of Jesus’ death is a non-issue respecting the Christian interpretation of Jesus as the Messiah in the passage. The only relevant question is whether the prophecy points to Jesus as the Messiah or not.

Still, Jesus knew exactly where he stood in the stream of time. When he said that “all the things written by means of the prophets” would be fulfilled, that included Daniel’s calculation.

- **Matthew 24:15** “...when you catch sight of the *disgusting thing*, as spoken about by Daniel the prophet [in 9:27], standing in a holy place... upon the wing of *detestable* things shall be that which causeth appalment [“devastation,” *Leeser*]...”

- **Luke 21:20**, (parallel account to Matthew 24), "...when you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then know that the *desolating* of her has drawn near."
- **Luke 18:31-33** "Then he took the Twelve aside and said to them: 'Look! We are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things written by means of the prophets about the Son of man will be accomplished. 32 For instance, he will be handed over to men of the nations and will be mocked and treated insolently and spat on [Isaiah 50:6]. 33 And after scourging him, they will kill him [Daniel 9:26, 27; Isaiah 53:8], but on the third day he will rise.'"
- **John 13:1** "Now because *he knew* before the festival of the Passover that *his hour had come* for him to leave this world and go to the Father, Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end."
 - The terminology in Mathew 24:15 and Luke 21:20 refers back to Daniel 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11.

Jesus certainly understood the timing of Daniel's prophecy; how it applied to him as the Messiah, and to the destruction of Jerusalem. He had his reasons for not explaining the chronology of Daniel 9 in detail to the apostles.

Your second sentence – "May I suggest that this is a more recent revelation that Christians have had through the holy spirit" – is, of course, said tongue in cheek. But the barb is a two-edged sword. It begs the question of why it took Jewish commentators some seven hundred years to formulate a concrete interpretation of Daniel 9 (from the return from Babylonian captivity to Seder Olam), and *1800 years* to come around to the idea that the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 is the nation of Israel rather than an individual. In contrast, it only took Christians some 170 years before they commented on Daniel 9 in relation to Jesus. In other words, the Christians reacted 10 times faster in understanding the prophecy of Daniel 9 and its relation to Jesus, than the Jewish intelligentsia took to agree that the Servant in Isaiah 53 is Israel and not an individual.³⁵

Yakov: What was the starting point for Daniel's countdown? If this was in the future how would Daniel know when to start the countdown?

Answer: Daniel was told when the countdown would begin, he did not have to be there to initiate it. The point being that it's a prophecy, the fulfillment happens in the future! In fact Daniel probably died some 80 years before the order was given and there were many things in his prophecies he did not understand.

- **Daniel 9:25 and 12:8-13** "...know and understand: *From the issuance of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem* until the [time of the] anointed leader... 12:8 Now as for me, I heard, but I could not understand; so I said: 'O my lord, what will be the outcome of these things?' 9 Then he said: 'Go, Daniel, because the words are to be kept secret and sealed up until the time of the end... 13 But as for you, go on to the end. You will rest, but you will stand up for your lot at the end of the days.'"

Yakov: If Jesus accomplished all the things that Daniel 9 is talking about, has it happened through the death of Jesus?

Answer: Yes.

Yakov: I ask a simple question, what has changed since Jesus died? It has only gotten worse.

Answer: Yes, things have gotten worse, this is undeniable.

Yakov: These are the six things that were supposed to happen which is exactly what Tanakh teaches as the Messianic Age:³⁶ Has transgression stopped? Has sin come to an end? Has eternal righteousness been achieved? The “prophetic vision” has not been “ratified,” fulfilled. Lions still eat lambs, right?

NOTE: The objection is a misdirection (though undoubtedly an honest mistake on Yakov’s part). He is saying that the six objectives are supposed to happen *as part* of the Messianic Age, which misstates the *Jewish* interpretation. The six objectives, according to Jewish belief, had to be met *before* the Messianic Age. Without the *finishing of transgression*, the *end of sin*, the *forgiving of iniquity* etc, the Messianic Age would not occur. Accordingly, the objectives are related to the Jewish *people* and *not* to world conditions. For this reason, Yakov’s focus on world conditions is misleading and his reference to *lions and lambs* is from Isaiah 11:6 and not Daniel 9.

As explained below, Christians also see the objectives (at least five out of the six) as relating to people rather than to world conditions. Similar to the Jewish view, Christians also believe that the Messianic Age would begin sometime *after* all six objectives were met by God’s servants.

Answer: From the Christian perspective, all six objectives have been fulfilled in relation to Jesus and his disciples, and the Messianic Age will occur according to God’s timetable.

The first four objectives are related to the New Covenant (discussed in depth in Chapter 1, *The Jewish Explanation of Jewish Suffering and Why it is Unacceptable*). Portions of Jeremiah 31:31-34 are quoted below in relation to each objective.

1. To finish the transgression. The New Covenant, inaugurated by Jesus the night before he died, was the basis for producing a *new* nation; spiritual Israel, composed of Jews and Gentiles. Those accepted into the New Covenant were truly “a people for his [God’s] name,” bringing him glory by keeping his commandments in contrast to natural Israel. This *finished the transgression* of God’s *chosen* people.—Acts 15:14.

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** “Look! The days are coming,’ declares Jehovah, ‘when I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant...³⁷
33 And I will become their God, and they will become my people. 34 And they will no longer teach each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know Jehovah!’ for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them,’ declares Jehovah.”
- **1 Peter 2:9, 10** “But you are ‘a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession... 10 For you were once not a people, but now you are God’s people.”

2. To make an end of sin. The sincere repentance of those in the New Covenant would keep them from returning to sinful ways. This meant “an end of sin” against God’s commandments among those forming the *new* Israel.³⁸

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** “Look!... a new covenant... 33 I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it... 34 they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them,’ declares Jehovah.”

3. To forgive iniquity. Jesus’ sacrifice served as a legal basis for absolving repentant Jews of their willful violations of the Law Covenant, which meant *forgiveness of their iniquity*. Gentiles who were brought into the New Covenant received forgiveness of inherited sin and imperfection.

- **Jeremiah 31:33-34** “Look!... a new covenant... 34 I will forgive their error, and I will no longer remember their sin.”

4. To bring in everlasting righteousness. Those whom God pardons by virtue of the ransom sacrifice are *declared righteous* and gain everlasting life; he “will no longer remember their sin.” This fulfills the “everlasting righteousness” spoken of in Daniel 9:24. (Romans 3:21-25) The ransom sacrifice makes possible, and ensures, that the Messianic Age will become a reality; a time when “the lion will eat straw [not lambs!] like the bull [and] the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.”—Isaiah 11:7-9.

5. To seal vision and prophet. The fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy by Jesus was a “seal” on “vision and prophet” in two ways. First, it validated the truthfulness of all the previous messianic prophecies and visions; it was a divine “seal” of approval. It also *sealed* the prophecy off from other claimants to the title of messiah, closing it to any other interpretation.

6. The Holy of Holies anointed. The expression, “Holy of Holies,” refers to the most inner compartment of the Temple in Jerusalem. Paul refers to God’s presence as, “...the greater and more perfect tent [Temple] not made with hands.”³⁹ (Hebrews 9:11) This “Holy of Holies,” God’s presence in heaven, was “anointed,” when Jesus began his ministry at his baptism. At that time, God’s presence in heaven took on the likeness of a *spiritual* Temple and Jesus began serving in the capacity of High Priest on earth. (Matthew 3:16) After his resurrection, Jesus, as High Priest, entered God’s presence “with his own blood,” the value of his human life.—Hebrews 9:11, 12, 24.⁴⁰

This is how all six objectives in Daniel 9:24 were fulfilled in the 1st Century. Since then, the prophecy’s timeframe has been “sealed,” and is no longer open to any other claim of fulfillment.

Understanding that the “Holy of Holies” refers to a *spiritual* Temple — God’s presence — clarifies how the *anointing* of the *spiritual Holy of Holies*, and the destruction of the literal Temple in Jerusalem, could take place within the same time frame. The fact that no physical Temple has existed in Jerusalem since 70 CE, makes the *spiritual Temple* explanation, the sixth objective, one that should not be rejected out of hand. What other alternative is there?⁴¹

Yakov: The Christians did not get it right and we still await for the Messianic Age to set in. Jesus’ dying on the cross can be used by Christians that all these things have been achieved. None of these happened and the world has become worse since Jesus died.

Answer: Things are worse, but neither the destruction of Jerusalem or current world conditions have any bearing on the question of whether Jesus and his disciples fulfilled the objectives of Daniel 9, as explained above. As a matter of fact, Jesus prophesied

both the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24) and the dramatic deterioration of world conditions preceding the Messianic Age, and millions see this as proof that we are living in the *last days*. (Matthew 24:7-14⁴²) In other words, worsening world conditions *confirm* Jesus' status as Messiah and that he and his disciples fulfilled the objectives in Daniel 9, they point toward Jesus' messiahship rather than away from it.

Here's a hypothetical scenario that might help clarify the point. Let's suppose the Jews had repented shortly after the destruction of the First Temple and fulfilled all the relevant objectives in Daniel 9. Even so, according to Jewish belief, they would still have had to endure decades of exile in Babylon and then, even after returning to Jerusalem, there would be over four centuries of "troubled times" under Persian, Greek and Roman domination, until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Neither the trials the Jews were undergoing, nor the turmoil in the world at large would have been relevant to the question of whether they, the Jews, had fulfilled the objectives in Daniel 9. The *people*, and whether they had repented, were the determining factors regarding the fulfillment of the objectives in Daniel 9, not world conditions.

Yakov: Just like in the Garden of Eden where G-d told Adam not to eat from the tree of life lest he die, here too G-d tells Daniel that "70 weeks" are given to Israel and Jerusalem to clean up their act. They did not clean up their act so are in exile till today. Here again it is Israel that has failed, not G-d.

NOTE: Yakov reiterates the interpretation that the 70 weeks (490 years) were a period meant for the Jews to repent. And, if they had, the Messiah would have appeared and initiated the Messianic Age.

Answer: You are comparing apples to oranges. In Genesis 2:17, God issues a command to Adam; if you do *this*, then *that* will happen. On the other hand, Daniel 9:24-27 is a straightforward prophecy, it says such and such will happen within a specified time period, end of story.

- **Genesis 2:17** "But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it, for on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die."
- **Daniel 9:24** "Seventy weeks [of years] have been decreed upon your people and upon the city of your Sanctuary to terminate the transgression and to end sin, and to expiate iniquity, and to bring eternal righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophet, and to anoint the Holy of Holies."

God does not *fumfer*.⁴³ God knows how to say "if" when he wants to, and he is quite capable of making himself understood without anyone having to put words in his mouth.⁴⁴ But that is exactly what the rabbis do in their interpretation of Daniel 9:24. Here's how they would like the text to be read:

"Seventy weeks have been decreed... FOR ISRAEL, to terminate ITS transgression and to end ISRAEL'S sin, and to expiate ISRAEL'S iniquity and... IF THEY DON'T REPENT, ISRAEL WILL CONTINUE IN EXILE UNTIL THEY DO."

Such additions to the verse are unnecessary and unwelcome. By adding words, "you pervert the words of the living God."—Jeremiah 23:36.

Daniel 9:24 says 70 weeks have been "decreed." This is not a command connected to a punishment for disobedience, no one is told to do anything, and there is no contingency

plan. There is no, *if this... then that*, seen or hinted at anywhere in the text, and no alternative outcomes depending on Jewish repentance. The explanation that “70 weeks were given to Israel to *clean up their act*,” is an unwarranted supposition that imposes a tendentious interpretation on a text that is communicating a very different message. The idea is invented out of whole cloth without support in the text itself. There may be any number of reasons why Orthodox Judaism has embraced such an interpretation, but none of them are biblical.

Yakov: If G-d clearly mentions that the “70 weeks” are given to Israel and their land to clean up their act, why do Christians believe that Jesus took it on himself and accomplished all these things when nothing has changed but got worse after his death?

Answer: Well, “*If* God clearly mentions...,” is really the whole point of the matter, isn’t it? The fact is that God does not *clearly* mention, vaguely allude to, hint at, or anywhere infer that Israel was allotted a period of time to change their ways or suffer until they did – even if it would take them 2500 years and more. An unsupported religious conviction based on Rabbinic interpretation is not the same as a fact. Interpretations are not facts, and irrational religious exuberance does not a fact make.

Jesus took nothing on himself, he did just what God tasked him to do, no more, no less.

- **Isaiah 53:12** “For that reason I will assign him a portion among the many, and he will apportion the spoil with the mighty, because he poured out his life even to death and was counted among the transgressors; he carried the sin of many people, and he interceded for the transgressors.”
- **John 7:28, 29; 8:29** “I have not come of my own initiative... 29 I am a representative from him, and that One sent me... 8:28 I always do the things pleasing to him.”
- **Luke 12:13, 14** “Then someone in the crowd said to him: ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ 14 He said to him: ‘Man, who appointed me judge or arbitrator between you two?’”

What Jesus accomplished (including the New Covenant) is the basis for the world of peace we all desire to see which God will bring about according to his own timetable. However, it should be remembered that the conditions Isaiah describes, the *lions don’t eat lambs* world of peace, are not part of the six objectives.

Yakov: Anyway, we are seeing some progress toward the Messianic Age such as the formation of the nation of Israel, 9 million Jews gathering into Israel etc.”

NOTE: The question of “progress toward the Messianic Age” as it relates to the formation of the nation of Israel and Jewish repentance, is dealt with at the end of *Why the Jewish Explanation of Jewish Suffering is Unacceptable*, in Chapter 1.

Answer: Progress toward the Messianic Age? Not if we are talking about repentance and returning to Torah. According to the Jerusalem Post headline: “Israel is one of the least religious countries,” it is not exactly an example of faith and morals, not exactly a “light to the nations.”⁴⁵ (The 9/23 census has Israel’s Jewish population at 7 million 200 thousand.)

Still, as strange as it may seem, this is the heart of the Jewish perspective: God is waiting for Israel to repent and return to Torah *before* he brings the Messianic Age. The

thought contradicts the Scriptures; God has his own timetable and has always followed it in accomplishing his will.

- **Genesis 6:3** “Then Jehovah said: ‘My spirit will not tolerate man indefinitely, because he is only flesh. Accordingly, *his days will amount to 120 years.*’”
 - The reference is to the timing of the flood and not to limiting man’s age, men continued to live much longer than 120 years.
- **Genesis 15:13-16** “He said to Abram: ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be foreigners in a land not theirs and that the people there will enslave them and afflict them for 400 years... But *they will return here in the fourth generation*, because the error of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.’”
- **Habakkuk 2:3** “For *the vision is yet for its appointed time*, and it is rushing toward its end, and it will not lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it! For it will without fail come true. *It will not be late!*”
- **Matthew 24:36-39** “[Jesus said] *Concerning that day and hour nobody knows*, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, *but only the Father.* 37 For just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. 38 For as they were in those days before the Flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, 39 and they took no note until the Flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be.”

Both Jews and Christians share the hope that the Messianic Age will eliminate the catastrophic conditions we see all around. There is, however, a fundamental difference in our views. Jews believe God has been waiting for “his people” to repent and return to Torah *before* bringing the Messianic Age.⁴⁶ In contrast, Christians believe God will act according to his own predetermined schedule, irrespective of Jewish repentance or what anyone else may or may not do.

Both positions require faith. But is there any basis to believe that the Jewish nation will repent anytime soon, or ever, for that matter? It has been over 2500 years since the exile in Babylon and they still haven’t repented as a nation. At this point in Israel’s long history, an unbounded faith that the Jewish nation will return to Torah and introduce the Messianic Age defies reason.

Personally, I feel much more assured knowing that God determines when he will bring an end to the troubling world conditions, and I am pleased we do not have to wait on the Jewish nation to repent before the Messianic Age begins. God help us all if that were the case! (And thank God it isn’t!)

DANIEL 9:24-27 IN HINDSIGHT

Yakov’s statement sums up the bottom line of the Jewish interpretation: “[The Jews] did not clean up their act so are in exile till today... it is Israel that has failed, not G-d.” He got it in one! Accordingly, the so called *second* exile (after Israel’s return from Babylon) would have been 420 years had they repented. They didn’t, so they are still in exile, and will presumably continue in exile until they *learn* to repent. Jewish suffering over millennia has been framed as if it were an *educational sabbatical*; God’s way of “teaching and inspiring” his “chosen people” to repent.

Interestingly, the Jewish interpretation of Daniel 9 lands in the same place as that of Isaiah 53; as an explanation of why the Jews are God’s chosen people despite enduring unspeakable suffering for so long. This turns hope filled prophecies into lugubrious dark

messages; an exercise in simultaneous self-loathing and self-aggrandizement. At the same time, it makes God out to be legalistic, cold, and excruciatingly vindictive. Aside from all other considerations, this single idea lays bare the Jewish interpretation of Daniel 9 and Isaiah 52/53, as tendentious, self-serving, antibiblical and, above all, insulting to Almighty God.

A friend commented that, “The orthodox interpretation of these passages is the most egregious case of theological NPD [narcissistic personality disorder] I have ever heard: ‘I might have done it, but I’m still great!’”

∞ ∞ ∞

POST DATA: When I was living in Tel-Aviv, I had discussions with a Jewish friend on Bible questions, and we inevitably landed on Daniel 9. I mentioned the prophecy says that messiah would be killed before the destruction of the Second Temple. He conceded the point but added, “But it doesn’t say it’s *Jesus*.” I agreed (had to) and replied, “Ok, it’s not Jesus, give me another name.” He couldn’t think of anyone at that moment but said he would get back to me on that the following week. When we met, and I asked if he had come up with another name, he said that he wasn’t able to think of anyone that fit the description: “But that doesn’t mean it’s Jesus!” I agreed, “Of course it doesn’t mean it’s Jesus, but it does narrow down the field a bit, doesn’t it?” Sometime later he said he could see that the prophecy referred to Jesus.

∞ ∞ ∞

G-D OR YHWH? THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD’S PERSONAL NAME – יהוה

AN EXPLANATION: I suggested that we discuss God’s personal name as our first topic because of Yakov’s scrupulous regard for the person of God; he writes “G-d,” out of respect and does not pronounce Jehovah or Yahweh, according to Jewish custom. As I pointed out to him: The personal name of God is the most repeated bit of information in the Bible. This makes it the most important theme in the Bible and therefore, the most important theme in the universe. Nothing is more important. What follows is the outline of our Zoom conversations which progresses according to questions Yakov had previously put to us and includes his comments. This is followed by an in-depth presentation of the subject I sent to Yakov.

NOTE: The information on God’s name may not be the most interesting theme for some, but it is far and away the most important in this book... or any book for that matter.

EXODUS 3:15 “Then God said once more to Moses: ‘This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, ‘Jehovah [יהוה] the God of your forefathers... has sent me to you... This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.’”

Most feel that “Yahweh” is the more correct pronunciation, but the final verdict is not yet in. Everyone in Israel recognizes “Yehova” (accent on the final syllable) as God’s name, though Orthodox and observant Jews do not pronounce the name. Jehovah is common in English as are variants of that pronunciation in many other languages. Why the exact pronunciation is not an issue is discussed later.

God's name represents "God himself" and every worshiper, Jew and Christian alike, should view this as a matter of the highest importance.

- **Malachi 3:16-18** "At that time those who fear Jehovah spoke with one another, each one with his companion, and Jehovah kept paying attention and listening. And a book of remembrance was written before him for those *fearing* Jehovah and for those *meditating* on his name."
- **Aish.com:** "Just as we revere God Himself, so must we show the greatest respect for His name, as the Torah states, '[You must] fear this glorious, awesome Name of God your Lord.'"—Deuteronomy 28:58

Here are a few texts that highlight the importance of God's name (dealt with extensively in the presentation following this one).

- To "forget his name" meant the person had abandoned Him.—Jeremiah 23:27.
- To "speak," "minister," or "prophecy" in God's name signified that the person was speaking for God himself.—Jeremiah 14:14-15.
- To take God's name "in vain" (swear falsely in God's name) would be an abuse of his person.—Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12.
- "Blessing" someone in God's name meant that Jehovah himself was blessing the individual.—Deuteronomy 10:8.
- "Cursing" someone in God's name meant that Jehovah himself was cursing the individual.—2 Kings 2:24.

God's personal name in Hebrew, YHWH [יְהוָה] is unique, there is only one *personal* name for God.

- **Exodus 3:15** "And God said further to Moses, 'So shall you say to the children of Israel, The Lord [YHWH] God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is how I should be *mentioned* in every generation.'"—*Chabad*.
- Only YHWH is used as a proper name. The Tanakh says, "our God" or "my God," but never "our YHWH," or my YHWH" ... "The true/living God," but never "true/living YHWH" ... "The God of Israel," but never "the YHWH of Israel." There is never a possessive pronoun, definite or indefinite article in front of YHWH, because it is a name and not a title.
- Terms such as: "God," "Lord," "All Mighty," etc, are titles, not names. They are a description of a characteristic or the function of an individual.
- **Aish.com:** "The Tetragrammaton is called God's 'proper name' (*Shem HaMeforash*). Though God Himself is absolutely unknowable and unnamable, the Tetragrammaton is His highest emanation in creation."

It is commonly thought that YHWH is derived from the third person singular of the causative form of the verb to be. Charles R. Gianotti writes (*The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH*): "Whatever the situation or need, God will 'become' the solution to that need. He is YHWH, the One who would meet their needs just as His name implies... Instead of being given a character sketch of God, Moses is given a promise... 'I will be who I will be,' i.e. 'I am the God who is and who will be active in whatever situations you are called to face' ... What God says, He will do. His Name promises that." What Gianotti is saying here is interesting; God's personal name is, in itself, a promise!

God encouraged the Israelites to pronounce his personal name: When the text says, "this is how I should be *mentioned*," it is referring to audibly pronouncing God's name.

The Hebrew word for “mention” in Exodus 3:15 is “zecher” (also translated, “acclaim, utter, remember, declare and memorial”).

The underlined words in the following texts are derived from *zecher*. The translation is *Chabad’s*, so YHWH is added where it appears in Hebrew:

- **Exodus 23:13** “...the name of the gods of others you shall not mention.”
- **Psalms 20:7** (8 in Tanakh) “...but we—we mention the name of the Lord [YHWH] our God.”
- **Isaiah 12:4** “And you shall say on that day, ‘Thank the Lord [YHWH], call in His Name, publicize His deeds among the peoples; keep it in remembrance, for His Name is exalted.’”
- **Isaiah 26:13** “O Lord [YHWH] our God, masters other than You have possessed us. Only concerning You will we mention Your name.”
- **Amos 6:10** “...and he shall say to [the one] who is in the end of the house, ‘Are there any more with you?’ and he shall say, ‘There is none.’ And he shall say, ‘Take them out.’ [This is] for not mentioning the Name of the Lord [YHWH].”

The word “mention” -זָכַר- *zecher*, often refers back to Exodus 3:15 when used in relation to God:

- **Exodus 3:15** “[YHWH] is My name forever, and this is how I should be mentioned in every generation.”
- **Isaiah 26:8** “O Lord [YHWH]... we hoped for You; for Your Name and for Your remembrance was the desire of [our] soul.”
- **Psalms 102:12 [13]** “But You, O Lord [YHWH], will be enthroned forever, and Your mention is to all generations.”
- **Hosea 12:5** “And the Lord [YHWH] is the God of the hosts; the Lord [YHWH] is His Name [remembrance/mention -זָכַר-].”

The biblical phrase, “I am Yahweh,” or “they shall know that I am Yahweh,” (more than 60 times in Ezekiel alone) is directly related to the definition of God’s name, namely that He, Yahweh, accomplishes his stated purpose regardless of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

- **Exodus 6:6-8** “Therefore say thou to the sons of Israel—*I am Yahweh, therefore* will I bring you forth from under the burdens of Egypt ...”—*Rotherham*.

The word “therefore,” is understood as, “according to the meaning of my name.” This instilled much more confidence in the Israelites than merely saying “Lord” or some other title.

- **Exodus 7:17** “Hereby shalt thou [Pharaoh] *know that I am Yahweh*... waters that are in the river... shall be turned to blood.”

Pharaoh would understand the full meaning of God’s name when he saw God accomplish what he said he would.

- **Exodus 14:18, 25** “And the *Egyptians shall know that I am Yahweh*... [and] the Egyptians said — We must flee from the face of Israel, for Yahweh is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”
 - “Yahweh” might have been the last word Pharaoh ever heard!

The book of Leviticus repeats the phrase, “I am Jehovah,” over 50 times after giving specific commandments to the Israelites. The significance of the phrase “I am Yahweh/Jehovah,” is far different and the impact of it far greater than, “I am the Lord,”

as it appears in most translations. God is not merely telling the Israelites they should obey his commandments because of his authority as “Lord,” rather he is letting them know that he, Yahweh, is the one who rescued them from Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and destroyed Pharaoh’s army. He is the living God who sees what they are doing.

- **Leviticus 18:4** “You should carry out my judicial decisions, and you should keep my statutes and walk in them. I am Jehovah your God.”
- **Leviticus 19:12** “You must not swear to a lie in my name and thus profane the name of your God. I am Jehovah.”
- **Leviticus 19:14** “You must not curse a deaf man or put an obstacle before a blind man, and you must be in fear of your God. I am Jehovah.”
- **Leviticus 19:16** “You must not go around spreading slander among your people. You must not stand up against the life of your fellow man. I am Jehovah.”

Knowing that God is Yahweh, was exceedingly more meaningful than knowing he is a powerful god. It meant knowing the meaning of his name; the one who accomplishes what he sets out to do... he who follows through on his purpose and promises. His name says it all.

- **Joshua 23:14** “I [Joshua] am going to-day, in the way of all the earth, ye must acknowledge... that there hath not failed a single thing out of all the good things which Yahweh your God spake concerning you, the whole hath come to pass to you, there hath not failed thereof a single thing.”
- **Psalms 9:10** “Thus let them who know thy Name put confidence in thee, that thou hast not forsaken the searchers for thee, O Yahweh.”

EXODUS 3:14... GOD DEFINES HIMSELF: “God said to Moses, ‘Ehyeh asher ehyeh (I will be what I will be),’ and He said, ‘So shall you say to the children of Israel, ‘Ehyeh (I will be) has sent me to you.’”—*Chabad*.⁴⁷

- “I will be” (or “I am”) in Exodus 3:14, “Ehyeh asher ehyeh,” is *not* another name of God.
- Ehyeh is the first-person singular of the verb to be (unlike YHWH which is God’s personal name and understood to be derived from the third person singular).
- Ehyeh is a common Hebrew word meaning “I *will* be.” For example: “Ehyeh (I will be) a lawyer/ businessman/actor... etc.”
- The word is used regularly in Hebrew; there is no ban on pronouncing it.
- Ehyeh only appears one time in connection with God’s name, in Exodus 3:14, and nowhere else.
- Zechar is never used in conjunction with “ehyeh” since it (ehyeh) is not a *name* that should be *mentioned* in relation to God.

The Tanakh nowhere prohibited pronouncing God’s name, the rabbis did.

- **Exodus 20:7**, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.”
- **Encyclopaedia Judaica**: “The avoidance of pronouncing the name YHWH... was caused by a misunderstanding of the Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11) as meaning ‘Thou shalt not take the name of YHWH thy God in vain,’ whereas it really means ‘You shall not swear falsely by the name of YHWH your God.’”
- **Jewfaq.com**: “Jews do not casually write any Name of God. This practice does not come from the commandment not to take the Lord’s Name in vain, as many suppose. In Jewish thought, that commandment refers solely to oath-taking, and is a prohibition against swearing by God’s Name falsely or frivolously (the word

normally translated as 'in vain' literally means 'for falsehood').”—
https://www.jewfaq.org/name_of_g-d.

God's name was in common usage during Bible times and was only definitively prohibited by the rabbis progressively over centuries. As jewfaq.com confirms: "Nothing in the Torah prohibits a person from pronouncing the Name of God. Indeed, it is evident from scripture that God's Name was pronounced routinely. Many common Hebrew names contain 'Yah' or 'Yahu,' part of God's four-letter Name. The Name was pronounced as part of daily services in the Temple."

Did the rabbis prohibit pronouncing God's name because they saw something that Moses overlooked? Not likely. But, if so, why did it take them centuries before they finally prohibited pronouncing the Name with the threat of capital punishment and the loss of eternal salvation?

- The Mishnah confirms that there was no prohibition against pronouncing the Name in ancient times and in fact, it recommends using God's Name as a routine greeting to a fellow Jew [based on Ruth 2:4] Berakhot 9:5.
- **Ruth 2:4** "Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters: 'Jehovah be with you.' And they replied: 'Jehovah bless you.'"—*NW Translation*.

The Lachish letters: A series of letters on clay ostraca in ancient Hebrew. Written to Yaush, possibly the commanding officer at Lachish, from Hoshaiiah, a military officer stationed in a city close to Lachish. The letters were probably written shortly before Lachish fell to the Babylonian army in 587/586 BCE, during the reign of King Zedekiah. (See Jeremiah 34:7.) The frequent appearance of God's personal name shows it was in common usage among Israelites.⁴⁸

- Letter 2: "To my lord, Ya'ush, may YHWH cause my lord to hear tiding(s) of peace today, this very day! Who is your servant, a dog, that my lord remembered his [se]rvant? May YHWH make known(?) to my [lor]d a matter of which you do not know."
- Letter 3: "Your servant, Hoshaiiah, sent to inform my lord, Ya'ush: May YHWH cause my lord to hear tidings of peace and tidings of good... As YHWH lives if anyone has ever tried to read me a letter!"
- Letter 4: "May YHWH cause my [lord] to hear, this very day, tidings of good..."
- Letter 5: "May YHWH cause my [lo]rd to hear tidings of pea[ce] and of good, [now today, now this very da]y!... May YHWH cause you to see the harvest successfully, this very day!"
- Letter 6: "To my lord, Ya'ush, may YHWH cause my lord to see peace at this time!... As YHWH lives, since your servant read the letters, your servant has not had [peace(?)]."
- Letter 9: "May YHWH cause my lord to hear ti[dings] of peace and of [good]."

The Moabite Stone: A non-Israelite inscription (c. 860 BCE), that mentions God's name (the Tetragrammaton), in the 18th line, and the name of King Omri of Israel.—*Jewish Encyclopedia.com*, Moabite Stone.

In light of the above, it is fair to say that the third commandment was never meant to prohibit Israelites from pronouncing God's name. If it was, it would have been listed along with the ban on idol worship, eating pork, etc, and no one, including Moses, would have used it in public. It is obvious that the rabbis latched onto Exodus 20:7, long after the fact, in order to justify their unscriptural ban on pronouncing God's name. God not

only permits humans to pronounce his personal name, but he encourages it. Pronouncing God's name is a God given privilege and he never authorized the rabbis to outlaw it.

Yakov: I have never called my father by his name, so it is hard for me to call G-d by his name. In my culture we call it respect. So also with G-d, *I respect, fear & honor G-d by not pronouncing his name.*" Also, no one calls their father by their first name. God is our Father and we should not call him by name.

Answer: Actually, it is common for people to call their father by their first name.⁴⁹ More importantly, the objection is cultural, and customs vary from place to place. God's commands should take precedence over culture and tradition in determining points of view, attitudes, and conduct. Culture and tradition should be sacrificed when they conflict with Scripture.

Scripture vs Culture: For sincere worshipers of God, Scripture has always trumped culture.

- **Genesis 35:2** "Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him: 'Put away the foreign gods that are in the midst of you.'"
 - Previously, Rachel had stolen Laban's teraphim. In Genesis 31:30-32 "[Laban says] 'why, though, have you stolen my gods?'... 32 But Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them."
 - Wikipedia (*Teraphim*): "Rachel may also have intended to assert her independence from her father and her legal rights within the extended family; in ancient Middle Eastern custom, the possession of familial idols was an indicator of authority and property rights within a family"
- **Matthew 15:3** "Why is it you also overstep the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

The negative consequences of putting culture and tradition above God's Word:

The long-range negative effects of not pronouncing God's personal name, begins with the Greek Septuagint, the first translation of the Tanakh:

- The Septuagint translated God's name in Hebrew letters instead of Greek letters.⁵⁰
- By the 4th/5th Centuries CE, God's name was removed entirely from the Greek text and replaced by *kurios* and *theos* (Lord and God, respectively).
- This practice legitimized the Jewish ban on pronouncing the divine name.
- The Septuagint set a precedent followed by translations into other languages that also removed God's name... with only a few exceptions in the major languages.⁵¹
- In 2000, the United Bible Society published the Chichewa language translation that replaces "Yehova/Yahve," for "Chauta," a tribal rain god.

Here are some examples from the Chichewa *Buku Loyera* (Holy Book):

- **Exodus 3:15** "This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'Chauta the God of your forefathers... has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.'"
- **Isaiah 42:8** "I am Chauta. That is my name; I give my glory to no one else, nor my praise to graven images."
- **Malachi 3:16** "At that time those who fear Chauta spoke with one another... and Chauta kept paying attention and listening. And a book of remembrance was

written before him for those fearing Chauta and for those meditating on his name.”

And the mind boggles!

There are some 2000 languages in Africa, 3000 tribes and much rivalry. With 25 million Chichewa speakers in different African countries that now being encouraged to use the name of their local god as if it were the personal name of God Almighty, the stage is set for animosity, contention and possibly even violence.

This *seismic* shift in translation can be traced back to the decision of the translators of the Septuagint to keep God’s name in Hebrew letters in the Greek text, and eventually replacing it for the Greek equivalent of Lord and God.

The erroneous position on God’s name causes overzealous defenders of it to disseminate false and nonsensical information, and Christians do the same.

- **Aish.com:** “The only place where the Tetragrammaton was ever pronounced as it is written was in the Temple in Jerusalem.”
- **Chabad.com:** “Names have a powerful control over the one we name.... Thus, to say God’s name is to have control over the universe... Stories are told that the angels utter the Ineffable Name to zoom back up to heaven. Amulet makers in the Middle Ages would write the Holy Name on parchment to create powerful, healing magic for their customers.”

The Aish statement is false, and the Chabad statements are just nonsense. Really, uttering God’s name “is to have control over the universe?!” This sort of thing turns God’s name into something like an amulet and puts thinking people off religion altogether.⁵²

The prohibition of pronouncing God’s name has also led to false interpretations of verses in the Tanakh. This can be seen in Leviticus 24:11 where a man *blasphemed* God’s name. Chabad explains that the man “pronounced” God’s name. The explanation is an effort at trying to justify the unjustifiable.

- **Leviticus 24:11** “The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name in *blasphemy*, and he was brought to Moses.”—*JSB*.
 - **JSB comment:** “Merely uttering ‘YHWH’ is not a crime... throughout the Bible this is a normal and even commendable action... Blasphemy consists of cursing God... that is, uttering an imprecation against Him in which His name is included.”
- **CHABAD:** “...in Leviticus 24:11, the Torah says the problem was that he committed the blasphemy of ‘saying the name.’”
 - Chabad’s comment is a fabrication.

If the rabbis had not invented baseless prohibitions that violate God’s stated will regarding his Name, they would not have had to twist themselves in knots inventing strained and erroneous explanations.

Why it matters: Forgetting God’s name means abandoning God.

- **Jeremiah 23:27** “They intend to make my people forget my name... just as their fathers forgot my name because of Baal [Lord].”

When the Jews began substituting God's name for "Lord/Baal," the same term the Canaanites used for their god, they easily slid into worshiping Baal along with their pagan neighbors and *forgot* God's name.

- **A History of Israel** "[Eventually] there was a growing reluctance to utter the divine name. In its place a number of surrogates were referred to, such as God or the Lord [etc.].... But, there was for all that a danger here.... The Jews eventually ceased being a 'people for his name' because they no longer used God's name. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, and the priesthood, animal sacrifices and the priestly blessing in God's name [Numbers 6:23-26] all ceased."⁵³

The lesson in all this is simple: You cannot let the camel's nose in the tent without negative consequences.

Yakov: We do not know how to pronounce the Name. Jehovah is a 15th Century invention (12th Century in Latin).

Answer: Around 600 CE (+/-), the vowel pointing for Adonay/Elohim was applied to the tetragrammaton. This vowel pointing gave rise to the pronunciation, "Yehova," "Jehovah," and other variants.

But the correct pronunciation is a nonissue in Israel. Religious Jews do not pronounce God's name because of the Rabbinic prohibition; the correct pronunciation has nothing to do with that decision.

- The pronunciation objection is a Christian argument. Certain Christian groups prefer using Lord/God instead of Jehovah alleging that the "pronunciation of the Name is uncertain."
- I only heard the pronunciation objection used once by an Israeli in my years in Israel. And I had many conversations on this topic.

Realistically, people in general would not pronounce God's name correctly even if the exact pronunciation were known.

Common names have differing pronunciations in most languages.

- Pedro in Spanish is Peter in English, and Butrus in Arabic.
- Yehoshua in Hebrew is Joshua in English, and Giosue in Italian.
- Etc... ad infinitum.

Then there's the consonant problem:

- Many non-native English speakers pronounce "V" instead of "W," or vice versa.
- Hebrew does not have a "J" and Spanish does not have an "SH."
- Russian transposes the "H" and "G," so Hitler comes out as "Gitlera."

And does anyone really care about any of this?

The exact pronunciation is not an issue. Yehova (Israeli pronunciation), and all its variants, Jehovah, Yahve, etc, are all widely known and recognized as the God of the Bible.

Yakov: It's better for God's name not to be known so people can't use it disrespectfully.

Answer: There are several contradictions in your comment.

- Since the exact pronunciation of the name is unknown, it can't be abused. R. Tovia Singer pronounces the name, "Jehovah," "because," as he says, "I know it is *not* correct." (Since there is no "J" in Hebrew he feels safe in pronouncing it.)⁵⁴
- Certainly religious Jews would never abuse or misuse God's personal name just as they would not misuse a substitute name for God ("Hashem, Elokim, Adoshem, Adonay, etc"). Could you imagine a Haredi Jew using Adoshem in a curse? The idea is unthinkable.
- Also, the ban hasn't worked. God's name has been known through the ages and today more so than ever, even if the pronunciation is unsure.

Yakov: Are you okay with people desecrating God's Name?"

Answer: No! It disturbs worshipers of God that his enemies treat his name with disrespect. Psalm 74:10, "How long O God... Will the enemy treat your name with disrespect forever?" The fact that God has tolerated those disrespecting his name for a long time shows where his priorities lie; having his Name known takes priority over the possibility of it being abused. God has not requested anyone to hide his name or forbid others to pronounce it. Moses not only pronounced God's name in the hearing of the Israelites, but he and Aaron also pronounced it in the hearing of Pharaoh and his court. (Exodus 5:2) The idea that man needs to hide God's name in order to *protect* God, is ludicrous. Almighty God has not requested man's protection, and he does not need it. He is God!

- **1 Chronicles 16:8, 35, 36** "Give thanks to Jehovah, you people; *call* upon his name, make his deeds known among the peoples!... 35 And *say*... 36 'Blessed be Jehovah.'"
- **מרקוס (Marcos) – Chabad website, chat (8/15/21):** "One can argue that replacing God's name with something else or continuously misspelling it is also using his name in vain. I don't agree with your interpretation of the third commandment. I think the third commandment is simply about using God's name in vain - that is in a context where you're not even supposed to refer to God - such as a joke. So yeah, it doesn't only apply to taking an oath, but it also doesn't mean you should keep misspelling it or replace it with Hashem because you're afraid to pronounce it wrong. That is not what God meant and like I said in the beginning one can argue that by doing so, you're actually disrespecting God's name and therefore using it in vain."⁵⁵

At the end of our conversation, which went two rounds (nearly 6 hours), Yakov wrote: "I would not call G-d by his name as I do not call my father, elders, people in authority. To me this makes sense that if I do not call these mere humans by their name why would I call G-d by his name who is the source of my every breath. I do this out of respect, not disrespect and not just culture. It is commonsense."

Yakov reluctantly conceded, after asking him three times, that God's name was widely used among Israelites in Bible times, that the third commandment, in Exodus 20:7, does not prohibit pronouncing God's name and nowhere in the Tanakh is there an injunction against pronouncing God's name. In retrospect, that hard-won recognition of three very basic points (pulling teeth might have been easier), was a preview of his responses generally, and to how it would all end. But... we pressed on.

GOD'S NAME AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

Yakov's focus in respect to God's name was unusual; he asked how many times a day he needed to pronounce it, and how pronouncing the Name would help him spiritually. We explained, or tried to, that pronouncing God's name x-amount of times is not the issue, rather grasping the importance and meaning of the Name is. Oddly enough, the concept was difficult for him to grasp. I thought it might be helpful to share passages from the Tanakh where worshipers of God mention his name in different contexts.

Introduction: The Bible passages below have been chosen to show the impact of God's name on inspired writers of Tanakh and the role the Name played in their relationship with God.

God's personal name was the basis for their concept of God, their morality, and their faith in God's promises. Most importantly, their relationship with God, be that Israel's covenant relationship or the individual's personal relationship, was based on the meaning of God's name. Audibly pronouncing the Name was merely a natural, and inevitable, outcome of the larger issue of knowing and appreciating its importance.

The following Bible passages are organized into 13 subheadings illustrating how worshipers of God viewed his name, how they used it and how it affected them personally. It is possible to "praise," "call" on God (in prayer) and "meditate" on his Name, *without* pronouncing it audibly. But these terms are obviously *related* to saying God's name in the hearing of others.

Israel's history bears out that the views and expressions below are the product of the faith of a small minority; prophets, psalmists, chroniclers of sacred history, and a couple of Israelite Kings. God wanted their thoughts to stand as a model of the appropriate view of how he should be thought of and worshiped, and he personally inspired them to record their thoughts. It was Israel's undoing that the nation only rarely reflected the attitude of these individuals. Their expressions should be read carefully and taken to heart by those desiring to please Almighty God.

What shall I repay to Jehovah for all his benefits to me? The cup of grand salvation I shall take up, and on the name of Jehovah I shall call. Psalm 116:12, 13

1. APPRECIATION for God's name: His name is synonymous with his loyal love (Hebrew, "chesed").

1 Chronicles 29:13 "And now, O our God, we thank you and praise your beautiful name."

- They saw God's name as "beautiful" and praiseworthy because of its meaning and because of God's saving acts.

Psalm 5:11 "But all those who take refuge in you will rejoice; they will always shout joyfully... and those loving your name will rejoice in you."

- God's servants loved his name because it was a guarantee of his promise to protect them. His very name is a promise that he would not fail them.

Isaiah 26:8 For your just ways, O LORD [YHWH] we look to you. We long for the name by which you are called.” (Hebrew, “zecher,” referring back to Exodus 3:15.)

- They *longed* for God’s name – literally: “longing of [their] soul” – that God gain glory for his name by fulfilling his promises toward them.

Malachi 3:16-18 “At that time those who fear Jehovah spoke with one another, each one with his companion, and Jehovah kept paying attention and listening. And a book of remembrance was written before him for those fearing Jehovah and for those meditating on his name... 18 And you will again see the distinction between a righteous person and a wicked person, between one serving God and one not serving him.”

- In Malachi’s day spiritism and adultery were rife, the defenseless were oppressed and defrauded, the presumptuous were admired and the wicked prospered. (See Malachi 3:5-15.) God condemned the Jews, for casting off the “wife of your youth” (God “hates divorce”). Even so, Malachi 2:15 says, “there was *one* who did not do it.” Even amid that deplorable situation, there was a group that still feared God, were “righteous,” and were “serving” him. At very least, Malachi and his close associates must have made up that group (the “one” mentioned in 2:15) “meditating” on God’s name. Malachi was obviously distraught because of Israel’s condition. “Meditating on God’s name,” was likely related to thinking of the dishonor that had been brought upon it by the moral corruption in the nation. They probably meditated as well on their personal obligations in relation to God’s name, and what they could do to improve the situation in Jerusalem. Malachi’s book was a step in that direction. The group of righteous individuals were also looking forward to the appearance of the promised messiah. (Compare Malachi 2:15 “and what was that one seeking? the offspring of God.”)
- Compare **Psalms 77:12** “I will meditate on all your activity and ponder over your dealings.”
 - **John 17:6, 26** “[Jesus prayed] ‘I have made your name manifest to the men whom you gave me out of the world... I have made your name known to them and will make it known.’”

2. BLESSING in God’s name

Numbers 6:23-27 “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is the way you should bless the people of Israel.’ Say to them: 24 ‘May Jehovah bless you and safeguard you. 25 May Jehovah make his face shine upon you, and may he favor you. 26 May Jehovah lift up his face toward you and grant you peace.’ 27 And they must place my name upon the people of Israel, that I may bless them.”

- Those reciting the blessing were told to “say... may Jehovah bless you...” Those today who recite this blessing but do not pronounce God’s name, are in violation of God’s explicit command.
 - **Mark 7:9** “You skillfully disregard the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.”

Ruth 2:4 “Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters: ‘Jehovah be with you.’ And they replied: Jehovah bless you.”

2 Samuel 6:18 “When David finished offering up the burnt offerings and the communion, he blessed the people in the name of Jehovah of armies.”

- David must have blessed the people with a loud voice when he pronounced God’s name due to the size of the crowd.

3. BOAST in God's name: This means taking pride in God's accomplishments and activity instead of focusing on oneself.

1Chronicles 16:10: "Boast about his holy name. Let the hearts of those seeking Jehovah rejoice."

- The *boaster* expresses pride that Jehovah is his God and attributes his personal accomplishments to God.
- The subtext here is an exhortation to be modest. This had a positive impact on the worshiper's personality. God detests those who are proud. (Compare Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 16:5 and Micah 6:8.)
 - **1Corinthians 1:31** "...so that it may be just as it is written: 'The one who boasts, let him boast in Jehovah.'"—*NW Translation*.

Isaiah 25:9 "In that day they will say: 'Look! This is our God! ... This is Jehovah!... rejoice in the salvation by him.'"

Isaiah 26:12 "O Jehovah, you will grant us peace, because everything we have done You have accomplished for us."

4. CALL on God's name: *Calling* on Jehovah and *praising* his name might be done silently in prayer as well as audibly. However, *declaring* God's name is always audible.

Genesis 12:8 "Later he [Abraham] moved from there to the mountainous region east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to Jehovah and began to call on the name of Jehovah." (The Hebrew verb "call," in Genesis 12:8, is "qara.")

- **Ibn Ezra** on Genesis 12:8: "This means he prayed there. It may also mean that he called upon men to worship the Lord [YHWH]."
- Whether Abraham invoked God in the hearing of others or not, he left no doubt to whom his praise was directed. If Abraham called on others to worship Jehovah, he would have pronounced God's name when telling them Jehovah was the true God.
 - **1 Samuel 26:14** "David called out to the troops and to Abner the son of Ner... Abner answered: 'Who are you who calls to the king?'"
 - **Hebrews 13:15** "Make public declaration to his name."

1 Kings 18:24 "Then you must call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Jehovah." (The same verb as Genesis 12:8.) The God who answers by fire will show that he is the true God."

- Elijah called on the name of God audibly. Compare **1 Kings 18:26-39** "[they] kept calling on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying: 'o Baal, answer us!'... 36 Elijah the prophet stepped forward and said: 'o Jehovah... today let it be known that you are God in Israel... 37 answer me, o Jehovah!'... 39 all the people... said: 'Jehovah is the true God! Jehovah is the true God!'"

Psalms 20:7 "Some rely on chariots and others on horses, but we call on the name of Jehovah our God."—As in Genesis 12:8.

- They invoked God, asking for assurance of victory.

Joel 2:32 “And everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved... just as Jehovah has said, the survivors whom Jehovah calls.”—As in Genesis 12:8.

- They *call* on Jehovah for salvation and he *calls* them by saving them, because *his name is called on them*. This is significant for those who desire to please God.
- **Rashi** on Joel 2:32, “just as the Lord has *said*: And where did He say it? (Deuteronomy 28:10), ‘And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Name of the Lord is *called* on you.’”
 - **Acts 2:21** “And everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.”—*NW Translation*, see also, Romans 10:13.

5. CONDUCT glorifies God’s name: God’s name impacted the conduct and moral standards of his worshipers.

2 Chronicles 6:24-26 “And if your people Israel are defeated by an enemy because they kept sinning against you, and they return and glorify your name and pray and beg for favor before you in this house... 26 When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they kept sinning against you, and they pray toward this place and glorify your name and turn back from their sin because you humbled them.”

- The conduct of God’s servants reflected for good or ill on his name. They had to live according to his standards to remain in a good relationship with him.
 - **Romans 1:21-24** “You, the one preaching, ‘Do not steal,’ do you steal? 22 You, the one saying, ‘Do not commit adultery’ do you commit adultery? You, the one abhorring idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who take pride in law, do you dishonor God by your transgressing of the Law? 24 For the name of God is being blasphemed among the nations because of you.”
 - **2 Timothy 2:19** “Let everyone calling on the name of Jehovah renounce unrighteousness.”—*NW Translation*.

Micah 4:2-5 “And many nations will go and say... “[Jehovah] will instruct us about his ways, And we will walk in his paths’... 3 They will beat their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore... 5 For all the peoples will walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God forever and ever.”

- Gentiles who become worshipers of Jehovah “in the final part of the days,” will “walk in God’s name” by virtue of adopting God’s moral standards and because they refuse to take part in wars. The impact that God’s name has on their conduct can hardly be overstated; it leads to international peace.

Malachi 4:1, 2 “...the day is coming... when all the presumptuous ones and all those practicing wickedness will become like stubble. But on you who honor my name, the sun of righteousness will shine, with healing in its rays; and you will skip about like fattened calves.”

- Worshipers of Jehovah *honor his name* by not being presumptuous or practicing things he condemns. Others may be moral and upright, but they do not *honor God’s name* because they are not known as worshipers of Jehovah and because his name is not *called upon them*.—Compare Deuteronomy 28:10.

6. DOING something in the authority of the Name: “In the name of Jehovah,” meant representing God himself.

Deuteronomy 18:5 “Jehovah your God has chosen him [Levi] and his sons from all your tribes to minister in the name of Jehovah always.”

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 “If any prophet presumptuously speaks a word in my name that I did not command him to speak... that prophet must die... 22 When the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the word... does not come true, then Jehovah did not speak that word.”

1 Samuel 17:45 “David replied to the Philistine: ‘You are coming against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I am coming against you in the name of Jehovah of armies, the God of the battle line of Israel, whom you have taunted.’”

- This was a battle of the gods and David was fighting in God’s name.

2 Kings 5:11 “At this Naaman became indignant and started to leave, saying: ‘Here I said to myself, ‘He will come out to me and stand here and call [as in Genesis 12:8] on the name of Jehovah his God, moving his hand back and forth over the leprosy to cure it.’”

2 Chronicles 14:11 “Asa then called to Jehovah his God and said: ‘O Jehovah, it does not matter to you whether those you help are many or have no power. Help us, O Jehovah our God, for we are relying on you, and in your name we have come against this crowd. O Jehovah, you are our God. Do not let mortal man prevail against you.’”

- Asa was representing Jehovah in the battle just as David had.
 - **John 5:43** “I have come in the name of my Father, but you do not receive me. If someone else came in his own name, you would receive that one.”
 - **John 10:25** “Jesus answered them: ‘I told you, and yet you do not believe. The works that I am doing in my father’s name, these bear witness about me.’”

Psalms 118:26 “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Jehovah.”

- The one *coming in Jehovah’s name* is blessed for bringing blessings from God.
 - **Matthew 23:39** “For I say to you, ‘you will by no means see me from now until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in Jehovah’s name!’”—*NW Translation*.

7. FEARING God’s name: Reverence for God’s name causes those fearing it to moderate their conduct.

Nehemiah 1:11 “O Jehovah, please, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who take delight in fearing your name, and please, grant success to your servant today, and may this man show me compassion.”

- Fearing God’s name meant keeping his commandments and was a basis for their prayers to be heard. (See Nehemiah 1:8, 9.)

Psalms 86:11 “Instruct me, O Jehovah, about your way. I will walk in your truth. Unify my heart to fear your name.”

- David asked God to “unify” his heart to fear his name so he would never again disobey his commandments.
 - **Revelation 11:18** “...the appointed time came for the dead to be judged and to reward... those fearing your name, the small and the great, and to bring to ruin those ruining the earth.”

8. INFORMING OTHERS that Jehovah is their God: Due to a spontaneous desire, or by divine request, servants of God were pleased to tell others about him.

Psalms 18:49 “That is why I will glorify you [give thanks] among the nations, O Jehovah, and to your name I will sing praises.”

- Worshipers of Jehovah let non-Israelites know that Jehovah had blessed them because they were grateful for having experienced salvation from him.

Psalms 22:22 “I will declare your name to my brothers; In the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

- They recounted to their brothers the blessings they had received from God.

Isaiah 25:11 “In that day they will say: ‘Look! This is our God! We have hoped in him, and he will save us. This is Jehovah! We have hoped in him. Let us be joyful and rejoice in the salvation by him.’”

- They were glad to say audibly, “this is Jehovah,” recounting what he had done for them and would yet do.

Isaiah 26:13 “O Jehovah our God, other masters besides you have ruled over us, but we make mention of your name alone.”

- The word “mention” is from the Hebrew root, “zecher,” as in Exodus 3:15. Isaiah and those in his circle, were determined to give exclusive devotion to Jehovah.

Isaiah 43:9, 10 “Let all the nations assemble in one place, and let the peoples be gathered together. Who among them [which god] can tell this [the future]? Or can they [the gods] cause us to hear the first things [recent events]? Let them [the gods] present their witnesses to prove themselves right, or let them [the nations] hear and say, ‘It is the truth! [that only Jehovah can foretell the future]’ 10 ‘You [Israelites released from captivity] are my witnesses,’ declares Jehovah, ‘Yes, my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and have faith in me and understand that I am the same One. Before me no God was formed, and after me there has been none.’”

- A universal court case is depicted here: The Jews were to be God’s “servant,” witnesses to the fact that Jehovah is superior to the Babylonian gods. God’s “witnesses” would have to pronounce his name, just as the worshipers, “witnesses,” of other gods would have to pronounce their names.

Isaiah 44:5 “One will say: ‘I belong to Jehovah.’ Another will call himself by the name of Jacob, and yet another will write on his hand: ‘Belonging to Jehovah.’”

- “Belonging to Jehovah” meant that each one, in one way or another, was making it known that they worshiped Jehovah and that “his name was upon them.”

Micah 4:2, 5 “And many nations will go and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah... And we will walk in his paths.... 5 For all the peoples will walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God forever and ever.’”

- In this prophetic scene, nations that come to worship Jehovah invite others to worship him and audibly “say” God’s name. Obviously, “Walking in the name of Jehovah” (verse 5), means much more than just making the Name known, but that is undeniably a part of it.

- **Romans 15:9** "...that the nations might glorify God for his mercy. Just as it is written: 'That is why I will openly acknowledge you among the nations and to your name I will make melody.'"

Zechariah 13:9 "I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'Jehovah is our God.'"

- God's people tell others that their God is Jehovah; that is what they "say," audibly.

9. KNOWING/TRUSTING in God's name: God's name has meaning, it's a promise of his protection and blessing for those worshiping him.

Exodus 6:5-8 "*I myself have heard the groaning of the people of Israel, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I remember my covenant. 6 Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am Jehovah, and I will... rescue you from their slavery... with an outstretched arm and with great judgments... 7 and you will certainly know that I am Jehovah your God who is bringing you out from under the burdens of Egypt... 8 I am Jehovah.'*"

- By reiterating "I am Jehovah" – 15 times in Exodus alone – God associates his name with being the keeper of promises. He had not forgotten his covenant and the Israelites would fully grasp the meaning of his name when he liberated them from slavery in the Egypt.
- The word "therefore" (at the beginning of verse 6) emphasizes that Jehovah accomplishes his stated purpose despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles.
- Pharaoh, and all the Egyptians, would likewise come to understand the full meaning of God's name upon seeing him do what he said he would.
 - **Exodus 7:17; 14:18, 25** "By this you [Pharaoh] will know that I am Jehovah... the water that is in the Nile River... will turn into blood... 14:18 And the Egyptians will certainly know that I am Jehovah when I glorify myself by means of Pharaoh, his war chariots, and his cavalrymen... 25 and the Egyptians were saying: 'Let us flee from any contact with Israel, because Jehovah is fighting for them against the Egyptians.'"

Psalm 9:10 "Those knowing your name will trust in you; You will never abandon those seeking you, O Jehovah."

- "Knowing" the meaning of God's name and its relation to him as the fulfiller of promises, is a basis for trusting him.
 - Compare **Psalm 77:12** "I will meditate on all your activity and ponder over your dealings."

10. NATIONS WILL HAVE TO KNOW THE NAME: God's express will is that the nations know his name, even if some abuse it.

Ezekiel 36:23 "I will certainly sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the nations, which you profaned among them; and the nations will have to know that I am Jehovah,' declares the Sovereign Lord Jehovah, 'when I am sanctified among you before their eyes.'" (Ezekial repeats this phrase some 60 times.)

- The nations will know exactly who Jehovah is when he destroys them. But those that love God, pray that his name be sanctified.
 - **Matthew 6:9** "You must pray, then, this way: 'Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified.'"

- **Acts 9:15** [Paul] is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel.
- **Revelation 4:15** “Who will not really fear you, Jehovah, and glorify your name?... For all the nations will come and worship before you, because your righteous decrees have been revealed.”
- **Revelation 13:6** “And it [the “wild beast”] opened its mouth in blasphemies against God to blaspheme his name.
- **Revelation 16:9** “And the people were scorched by the great heat, but they blasphemed the name of God, who has the authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give glory to him.”
 - The last two texts in the above list show that in the last days God’s enemies know his personal name and blaspheme it.

Psalm 74:10 “How long, O God, will the adversary keep taunting? Will the enemy treat your name with disrespect forever?”

- It disturbs worshipers of God that his enemies treat his name with disrespect. The psalmist says, “how long,” because God has tolerated those disrespecting his name for a long time.
 - **Revelation 19:1-6** “They said: ‘Praise Jah! The salvation and the glory and the power belong to our God’... 3 And right away for the second time they said: ‘Praise Jah!’... 4 And the 24 elders... worshipped God... said: ‘Amen! Praise Jah!’... 6 And I heard... a great crowd... They said: ‘Praise Jah, because the Lord our God, the Almighty, has begun to rule as king!’”
 - They praise Jehovah because no defamers of his name remain on earth.

Isaiah 52:5 “‘What, then, should I do here?’ declares Jehovah. ‘For my people were taken for nothing. Those ruling over them keep howling in triumph,’ declares Jehovah, ‘and constantly, all day long, my name is treated with disrespect.’”

Jeremiah 10:25 “Pour out your wrath on the nations who ignore you and on the families who do not call on your name.” (“call,” as in Genesis 12:8.)

- Those refusing to call on God’s name will perish when he judges the nations.

11. PRAISING God’s name in prayer: There was never any ambiguity about which God they were praising, whether the praise was silent or audible.

Nehemiah 9:5 “And the Levites... said: ‘Stand up and praise Jehovah your God throughout all eternity. And let them praise your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.’”

1 Chronicles 16:8-36 “Give thanks to Jehovah, you people; call upon his name, make his deeds known among the peoples!... 23 Sing to Jehovah, all you of the earth!... 24 Relate among the nations his glory, Among all the peoples his wonderful acts... 28 Attribute to Jehovah, O families of peoples... glory and strength. 29 Attribute to Jehovah the glory of his name, 31 And let them say among the nations, ‘Jehovah himself has become king!’... 34 Give thanks to Jehovah, you people, for he is good, for to time indefinite is his loving-kindness.’ 35 And say... 36 ‘Blessed be Jehovah the God of Israel from time indefinite to time indefinite.’”

- This was said when the ark was brought to Jerusalem. Worshipers of Jehovah desired that all nations would come to know and worship him.

Psalm 100 “Shout in triumph to Jehovah, all the [people of the] earth. 2 Serve Jehovah with rejoicing... 3 Know that Jehovah is God. He is the one who made us, and we belong to him... 4 praise his name. 5 For Jehovah is good; His loyal love endures forever, and his faithfulness through all generations.”

- Verse 5 is a succinct description of God’s character, repeated some 42 times in the scriptures. The gods of the nations were nothing like Jehovah, and the Jews wanted the non-Israelites to know this so they too might honor and worship their God instead of the false gods.

Psalm 74:21 “May the crushed one not turn away disappointed; May the lowly and the poor praise your name.”

- The psalmist expresses unselfish concern for the downtrodden and asks God to bless them so that they would praise his name.

12. REJOICING in God’s name: Worshipers of Jehovah found great joy in participating in tasks God had assigned them and in the assurance of his backing and salvation.

Psalm 5:11 “But all those who take refuge in you will rejoice; they will always shout joyfully... and those loving your name will rejoice in you.”

- Loving God’s name is the same as rejoicing in God himself.

Isaiah 25:11 “In that day they will say: ‘Look! This is our God! We have hoped in him, and he will save us. This is Jehovah!... Let us be joyful and rejoice in the salvation by him.’”

- Seeing the defeat of God’s enemies, and experiencing salvation by him, was a source of joy for those who hoped in Jehovah (see context).

Nehemiah 8:10 “He said to them: ‘Go, eat the choice things and drink what is sweet, and send portions of food to those who have nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord, and do not feel sad, for the joy of Jehovah is your stronghold.’”

- God was joyful at seeing his people accomplish his expressed will of rebuilding Jerusalem. Those who shared his project shared in his joy. This was a source of strength that was unavailable to the nations.

13. SINGING praises to God’s name (along with dancing): They sang joyful songs praising God’s personal name with musical accompaniment.

2 Samuel 22:50 “That is why I will thank you, O Jehovah, among the nations, and to your name I will sing praises.”

Psalm 66:4 “All the earth will bow down to you; They will sing praises to you; They will sing praises to your name.”

Psalm 149:3 “Let them praise his name with dancing and sing praises to him, accompanied by the tambourine and the harp.”

CONCLUSION: The above biblical passages reflect the spirit and attitude of faithful worshipers in Bible times; how they viewed God’s name, the impact it had on their lives and the importance of the Name in their personal relationship with God. Those passages should be looked at like a *mirror*, so one can see how their own relationship with God lines up with that of previous servants of his. Had the nation as a whole

shared the same love for God's name as those Bible writers, Israel would never have gone into exile.

Generic terms such as *God* and *Lord* could never convey all that is encapsulated in God's personal name. Since the Egyptians worshiped over 2000 gods, it would have been meaningless for Moses to tell Pharaoh: "the Lord God of Israel [said], 'Send out My people, and let them sacrifice to Me in the desert.'" This is why God's name appears so frequently in Exodus, over 400 times!

It would have been equally meaningless for an Israelite to tell a pagan, "We worship the *Lord*," because the pagans also called their deities Lord (the word Baal means Lord). Every pagan would have said that they too worshiped the *Lord*. The deeds attributed to Jehovah distinguished him from all the pagan gods.

The importance of God's name in the Israelites' relationship with him cannot be overstated. Their morality was related to God's name; the Ten Commandments begin with, "I am Jehovah your God," and then repeat his name another seven times. There was no other god like Jehovah, who had given them a compendium of laws unrivaled by anything the other nations had.

- **Deuteronomy 4:7, 8** "For what great nation has gods as near to it as Jehovah our God is to us whenever we call on him? And what great nation has righteous regulations and judicial decisions like this entire Law that I am putting before you today?"

They had the incomparable privilege to "call on" Jehovah for protection and salvation because his name was upon them.

- **Numbers 6:27** "And they must place my name upon the people of Israel, that I may bless them."
- **Deuteronomy 28:10** "All the peoples of the earth will have to see that Jehovah's name has been called upon you."
- **Joel 2:32** "And everyone who *calls on the name of Jehovah* will be saved... just as Jehovah has said, the survivors whom Jehovah *calls* [to save]."

The Name evoked God's qualities; "loyal love," "mercy" "compassion," "patience," "truth" etc. So, they *boasted* in Jehovah, *their* God, attributing to him honor and glory for his marvelous acts. This too had an impact on their character, moving them to be modest rather than thinking too much of themselves and their own accomplishments. They loved God's name because they loved God himself.

- **Micah 6:8** "And what is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?"

Their prayers, an important part of their relationship with God, were also impacted by their deep appreciation for God's name. They prayed that the nations might know Jehovah. They were distressed when their brothers dishonored God's name by their conduct and when pagans abused it. Jesus reflected this same attitude in the *Lord's prayer*. The very first item on the list of things to pray for was the sanctification of God's name.

- **Matthew 6:9** "Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified."

They were eager to tell others that their God, Jehovah, was "the maker of heaven and earth" and they made sure there was no ambiguity about God's name. No other god, by

whatever name, was worthy of receiving the honor and glory reserved for Jehovah, *their* God.

- **Isaiah 42:8** “I am Jehovah. That is my name; I give my glory to no one else, nor my praise to graven images.”
- **Psalms 124:8** “Our help is in the name of Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

Their heartfelt desire was for non-Jews to *know* Jehovah, they rejoiced when sharing what he had done for them and they believed that one day, everyone on earth would love and worship him as they did.

- **Isaiah 11:9** “Because the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.”
- **Isaiah 56:6** “For my own house will be called even a house of prayer for all the peoples.”

The joy and appreciation they felt for *their* God was irrepressible, and they expressed it in song, praising Jehovah with musical accompaniment and dancing. Their love for God’s name and the joy it produced, added a spiritual dimension to their lives unrivaled by pagan celebrations. The “joy of Jehovah,” was a source of strength for them. Only those who loved and honored God’s name in the depth of their soul, had access to that source of joy and the strength they derived from it.

- **Isaiah 40:30, 31** “Boys will both tire out and grow weary, and young men themselves will without fail stumble, but those who are hoping in Jehovah will regain power. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not tire out.”

The quotation at the beginning of this discussion sums up the heartfelt appreciation loyal servants of God felt:

Psalms 116:12, 13 “What shall I repay to Jehovah for all his benefits to me? The cup of grand salvation I shall take up, and on the name of Jehovah I shall call.”

These personal expressions of worshipers of God in Bible times illustrate the role God’s name played in their relationship with him. Meditating on their expressions and following their example will impact one’s relationship with God for the better.

God’s name cannot be separated from the person of God. Aish.com stated the matter well: “Just as we revere God Himself, so must we show the greatest respect for His name.”

God’s personal name represents his person: To love God’s name, is to love God himself... to defame God’s name is to defame God. Knowing God’s name is the first and most basic element in a relationship with him.

In the final analysis, nothing less than one’s *relationship* with God is at play. Those that love God’s name enjoy a special relationship with him that others do not possess or comprehend. Their concept of God is different to those that don’t love the Name; they feel a sense of responsibility toward those that don’t know God, something not shared by others who do not appreciate God’s name. Their source of joy and their prayers are different from the prayers of those that don’t know, honor, and appreciate God’s name in the same way that faithful worshipers of Jehovah did in Bible times.

God's Name was the basis for the *covenant relationship* with Israel as well as a *personal relationship* with God. Simply stated: There can be no *authentic* relationship with God without a similar connection with his holy name to that enjoyed and expressed by faithful worshipers in Bible times.

How could there be? Those that don't appreciate the Name, or hide it, don't rejoice in sharing with others what *Jehovah* has done for them. They may appreciate that God is the Creator, but their prayers do not include praise for God's name and concern that the nations come to know the Name and serve the one it represents. They may feel a measure of satisfaction due some laudable personal goals, but that is not the same as "the joy of Jehovah." So, whatever relationship they feel they have with God, it is not comparable, in any *biblical* sense, to the multifaceted and deeply meaningful relationship that worshipers of Jehovah enjoyed in Bible times and also today.

Today, many Christian groups avoid God's personal name and prefer the title "Lord." Jews say they "honor" God's name by hiding it, Muslims declare that *Allah* is God and Hindus have a pantheon of tens of thousands of gods.

If past worshipers of Jehovah could see the religious landscape confronting mankind today, they would probably say:

"For all the peoples will walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God forever and ever."—Micah 4:5.

∞ ∞ ∞

After the above discussion, Yakov wrote: "It makes more sense to me that that the passages commanding us to 'use his name,' 'make his name known,' 'praise his name,' 'glorify his name,' 'fear his name,' etc, are talking about who G-d *is* rather than uttering or pronouncing the name of G-d. Agree to disagree and move on."

Months later, when our conversations ended, Yakov returned to what he had discussed regarding God's name, and wrote that we had "wasted" his time "discussing how calling G-d as Jehovah [or Yahweh] is important."

∞ ∞ ∞

- CHAPTER 3 – YAKOV'S OBJECTIONS: JESUS, CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

Along with the major topics already discussed, we kept up a running dialogue on WhatsApp. Well, Yakov was running, I was just trying to keep up. The man seems to have barrels of ink at his disposal, and unlimited hours for religious discussion. I was too slow in responding for his liking, he was piqued, and I got a reprimand.

Yakov: You said, Isaiah 53... is connected with the Babylon exile. I shared inputs that this cannot be and you refuse to respond.

Me: You are a prolific writer, lots of output. I try very hard to keep up with what I can, but I am a caregiver and due to family responsibilities, I am not able to respond to everything in a timely manner and some things slip by me. I set an agenda to answer your questions and assured you that I have taken each one of your questions into account and that I would deal with each one.

Following are 11 topics we discussed via WhatsApp.

∞ ∞ ∞

“JESUS DID NOT FULFILL JEWISH MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS”

Yakov: “The template for the messiah is very clear in the Tanakh and Jesus did not fulfill any of these expectations, so the Christian Scriptures came up with the second coming.”

NOTE: According to Jewish tradition, the "Messianic template" is a set of requirements the Messiah must fulfill. Contrary to popular belief, it evolved over centuries through rabbinic interpretation of biblical prophecies.

Answer: The suggestion that there was a clear “template for the messiah” in Jesus’ day is a myth. In *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, Emil Schurer elucidates a fact overlooked by Jewish outreach websites: “...the Messianic hope received an entirely new colouring in later times... [the scribes] worked at and settled in detail the whole circle of religious ideas, and especially the Messianic expectations. Thus the poetic picture became learned dogma.”⁵⁶ In other words, the so-called “messianic template” was formulated long after the 1st Century, around 200 CE. Prior to the rabbis reformulating the “whole circle of religious ideas,” there were various messianic trends.

In *Shield and Sword (Magen VaHerev)*, Rabbi Juda Leon de Modena (1571-1625), wrote, “At the end of the era of the second Temple, there were several trends in Judaism, which were all in accord with the Torah of Moses but disagreed in their interpretation of Scripture... The Nazarene chose the best and most just among these trends.” (R. Juda Leon’s comments were made in the context of attacking Christian dogma and not in defense of Jesus’ messiahship.⁵⁷)

Not only were there several messianic trends in the 1st Century, one of the more popular ones was that *two* messiahs would appear in succession. Historian Salo Baron explains, “The Jews believed that there would be two messiahs, the first, the son of Joseph, and the second, the son of David.”⁵⁸ He then points out something rarely appreciated, “[The Messiah son of Joseph] was always conceived as a powerful, triumphant general that would lead the people to one victory after another but eventually fall on the battlefield. His death as a hero and martyr would then open the door for the appearance of the final redeemer, the son of David. This explains why the repeated executions of all the minor military zealots, far from constituting a sign of defeat, could be interpreted as merely a stage of the divine plan to inaugurate the Messianic Age... Practically anyone could captivate the attention of [the] people.”—Volume 2, page 68, 71, Spanish edition.

All the false messiahs, and there were many, were embraced *because* of the messianic expectations fomented by the rabbis. Had Jesus appeared sword in hand, heading up a rebellion against Rome, multitudes would have followed him. Jesus’ words accurately reflect the historic reality of the day, “I have come in the name of my Father, but you do not receive me. If someone else came in his own name, you would receive that one.”—John 5:43.

Motivated by messianic fervor in their struggle to liberate Israel from Roman domination, and enjoying Rabbinic support from one quarter or another, the military messiahs finally brought about the cataclysmic end of Jerusalem, its Temple and Judaism as it had been practiced for over 1500 years. Sixty five years later, General Shimon Ben-Kosiba revolted against Rome and the famed Rabbi Akiva declared him Messiah. When Rome crushed the rebellion in 135 CE, the Jews were expelled from Jerusalem.

Back then, going with the guy who the rabbis *rejected* would have been the course of wisdom. Considering their track record, it was a sure bet that whoever the rabbis backed could not possibly be the messiah. Collectively, the rabbis were like a goalie who allows every single goal to get past him and then blocks the only member of his team capable of scoring.

Finally, with so many disasters mounting up, including the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the rabbis realized that enough was enough and banned armed rebellion as well as any attempt to forcefully hasten the Messianic age (Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 111a, the Three Oaths). They also mandated that “one who calculates the end of days has no portion in the World to Come.”⁵⁹ And so, that put an end to all of that... except that it didn’t. Despite the ban on armed rebellion and calculating the coming of the messiah, the rabbis kept on calculating, and the “messiahs” kept on coming... with rabbis and multitudes in tow.⁶⁰

As seen in their Talmudic decrees, the rabbis eventually came full circle to the same non-violent position that Jesus had advocated, which, it would seem, was “the best and most just among these [messianic] trends,” as R. Juda Leon said. Those today who allege that Jesus was *not* the messiah because he did not line up with a supposed Rabbinic template, have latched on to what might be the worst ever argument anyone could think of. It is even more baffling that it is all over the internet. It’s not only bad history, but also bad theology. It’s just dumb.

However, Jesus did fit the *biblical* template of the messiah; including his background (Isaiah 53:1-3), his mission (Isaiah 53:4, 5), his personality (Isaiah 42:2, 3), and his death (Isaiah 53:7-9). In *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Salo Baron, writes, “We have no reason to deny that [Jesus] may have appeared to the majority of [the Jewish population] to be the messiah, the confessed son of David.”—Volume 2, page 78, Spanish edition.

The Messiah’s resurrection and return in power, his “second coming,” is not a Christian invention, it is in the Tanakh. It is seen in Isaiah 53:10-12 where the Servant presents his life as a guilt offering and then *prolongs his days*. (See Addendum 1, *1800 Years of Jewish Interpretation Identifying the Servant as an Individual*.)

In Psalm 110:1, 2, “Jehovah declared to my lord, sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.” David’s “lord,” the Messiah, would have to be resurrected in order to sit at God’s right hand and fulfill the rest of the text. (Psalm 110 is applied to the Messiah in Bereshit Rabbah 85, and Bemidbar Rabbah 18.)

Daniel’s vision in 7:13, 14, fits the picture of the second coming: the “son of man” is seen in heaven and is “given rulership, honor, and a kingdom, that the peoples, nations, and language groups should all serve him.”⁶¹ In harmony with this, Christians believe the Messiah is destined to replace man’s governments with God’s Kingdom. Though Orthodox Jews reject this idea in the main, ironically it is virtually the same as many

thousands who are members of Chabad and their rabbis, and even non-Chabad rabbis, believe regarding Rabbi Schneerson who died in 1994. (See the final “messiah” in the list below.)

NOTE: Yakov was unfazed when I mentioned that a group of Schneerson’s followers believe he is the resurrected Messiah, “even higher than God.” “So what, you have crazies in every religion, right?” Well, yes... undeniably. But how many “crazies,” are we talking about? According to Orthodox Jewish scholar Dr. David Berger, “...the conviction that the Rebbe is fully divine... [is] not confined, as most observers assume, to a small number of unbalanced individuals... it is difficult to avoid the impression that believers constitute a majority of full-fledged Lubavitch Hasidim.” If Berger is right, we are talking about more than half of Chabad’s 100,000 members. If his estimate is overly liberal, then the number is something less than half. No matter how you slice it, that’s a lot of “crazies.” (See Endnote 63.)

But more to the point, how much credence can one give to a “messianic template” that has been consistently disregarded by rabbis and the Jewish population ever since it was formulated long after the 1st Century? The next section will be helpful in answering the question. (See Endnote 56.)

Two-Thousand Years of Jewish Messiahs

The following is a revision. The presentation, as it stood, may have sufficed for Christian readers, but I felt it lacked sufficient information for Jewish readers who approach the topic from a different angle. I previously failed to include the “messianic template” as it is presented today, an important omission. And I decided a complete list of pseudo-messiahs was necessary, instead of just a few examples. Most importantly, more clarification was needed to show the relationship between the pseudo-messiahs and the “messianic template.” Or, more precisely, to show the *lack* of relationship of the pseudo-messiahs to the “messianic template.”

∞ ∞ ∞

Versions of the so called, “messianic template,” with slight differences, appear on many Jewish outreach websites. The following “template” is posted on the Jews for Judaism website for the purpose of showing that Jesus is *not* the Messiah. It has eight *requirements* (expressed differently in other websites) that must be met before an individual can be fully accepted as *the* Messiah. I encourage the reader to look it up.—
<https://jewsforjudaism.ca/why-jesus-is-not-the-jewish-messiah/>.

“[The] following criteria must be fulfilled *before* any person can be acknowledged as the Messiah.”

- The Messiah must be...
 1. from the Tribe of Judah,
 2. a Descendant of King David,
 3. *and* King Solomon.
- When the Messiah is reigning as King of Israel...
 4. the Jews will be ingathered from their exile and will return to Israel.
 5. The Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt,
 6. there will be universal disarmament and worldwide peace with a complete end to war.

7. The Messiah will reign as King at a time when all the Jewish people will observe G-d's commandments,
8. the Messiah will rule at a time when all the people of the world will come to acknowledge and serve the one true G-d.

Claimants to the title of Messiah have risen among the Jewish people at least from the 1st Century until today. Some were generals, others performed "miracles," or foretold future events. There were "teachers," and mystics (including rabbis) who claimed to have "two souls," some were sincere, but others were opportunists who took advantage of their "brothers." Most, but not all, received rabbinic support. However, for nearly 2,000 years that pseudo-messiahs have been appearing, I have seen no historical record that a "messianic template" was ever used by the rabbis or the Jewish public to vet their claims. Arguments of rabbis who rejected certain *messiahs* are recorded, but there is no mention of a "messianic template," "requirement list," "messiah check list," or anything resembling a codified number of requisites an individual would have to fulfill before being acclaimed *the* Messiah.

For example, Maimonides (Rambam), one of Judaism's greatest rabbis, never refers to the "messianic template" while giving counsel regarding false messiahs in his letter to Yemen (*Iggeret Teman*), written 1173/74.—

https://www.sefaria.org/Iggeret_HaRambam%2C_Iggeret_Teiman.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

He writes: "The Messiah is not a person concerning whom it may be predicted that he will be the son of so and so, or of the family of so and so... Isaiah referring to the arrival of the Messiah implies that neither his father nor mother, nor his kith nor kin will be known, 'For he will shoot up right forth as a sapling, and as a root out of the dry ground.' (53:2)."

Maimonides is pointing out that the immediate family of the messiah would be unknown, very different to someone born into a royal family as designated heir to the throne. Even though he is talking about messiah's lineage, Maimonides omits the "template's" first three requirements – "from the Tribe of Judah, a Descendant of King David *and* King Solomon" – and he makes no mention of requirements 4-8.

He then points to a way of identifying the Messiah that is not in the "template": "...he will prove by means of *miracles and wonders* that he is the true Messiah... [and] will strike terror into the hearts of all the kings of the earth... Isaiah refers to... the verse, 'Kings shall shut their mouth because of him.' (52:15)."

Instead of the "template's" messianic requisites, Maimonides mentions *miracles and wonders* which are not on that list. Maimonides wrote elsewhere that the messiah's identity can only be confirmed *after* he builds the Temple and gathers the dispersed of Israel (numbers 4 and 5 in the "template"), but he did not say it in the Letter to Yemen when dealing with an actual case of a pseudo-messiah.

As a side point, notice that Maimonides quotes from Isaiah 52:15 and 53:2, in reference to the Servant of Jehovah, the Messiah, as an individual. In contrast, Rabbinic opinion today is adamant that these verses refer to the nation of Israel and not to an individual.

Upon reviewing the list of messianic pretenders, it becomes clear that certain factors were responsible for the messianic fervor they engendered.

- A charismatic personality; the majority of pretenders fit this description.
- Military prowess; especially in the 1st and 2nd Centuries, but also in some later generations.
- Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah, became a constant from the 13 Century to the present.
- The people were more open to embracing messianic claimants in times of Jewish persecution and hardship.

Twelve non-“template” proofs of messianic status alleged by pseudo-Messiahs or their followers. (The anonymity of some messianic pretenders and the little information regarding others, means the statistics given below are best approximations.)

- Transmigration and superfetation of souls – “essentially ‘getting pregnant with another soul’ on top of the one they are already cultivating” – based on the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. Sixteen pseudo-messiahs based their claims on the Kabbalah, 12 of them believed in the transmigration and/or the superfetation of souls, 6 were rabbis, some of whom are still revered in our day.
- Divine revelations, visions and communicating with the dead. Nine pseudo-messiahs made this claim.
- Calculations when the Messianic Age would begin: Eight made this claim, sometimes giving multiple dates in view of failed predictions.
- Miracles: Seven pseudo-messiahs made this claim.
- Bible texts cited as proof of messiahship: In at least 6 cases, followers of a “messiah” alleged a Bible passage that had no relation to the “template” as “proof” of the individuals messiahship.
- The individuals death is not accepted: There are 4 cases where followers refused to believe that their “messiah” had died.
- An illiterate messianic pretender writes a book or commentary: Three individuals and their followers made this claim. Especially interesting because the same claim is made regarding Muhammed.
- Deified after death: True in the case of 2 messianic claimants.
- The name “*Menahem*,” given or adopted, cited as a name of the Messiah. There are 2 cases of this.
- Being the last in the line of *holy* individuals: There are 2 cases of this.
- The pseudo-messiah declared he was God on earth: There are 2 cases of this.

Two requisites in the “messianic template” alleged by, or in favor of, pseudo-messiahs.

- A descendant of King David: Two have made this claim; in the 2nd Century and the 20th. Those who alleged they received the soul of the Messiah, or Messiah son of David, might also have claimed they were descendants of King David because *his soul became part of them*. Naturally, this would not cover the requirement of being in Solomon’s line (#3 in the “template”) nor would it cover those who claimed to have received the soul of Messiah son of Joseph.
- The restoration of Israel (might be said to include requisites 4, 5 and 7): There were 8 messianic claimants who stated this goal.

I am obliged to clarify that neither the following list nor the preceding information is an indictment of the Jewish people as if they were/are somehow more susceptible to embracing false messiahs than those of other religious groups. Many *messiahs*, or their equivalents, have been revered by large groups among Christians, Muslims and the like. A quick Google search reveals that as of December 24, 2017, “At least seven men

around the world claim to be Jesus Christ reincarnated, and many have a following of devoted believers.” So, it cannot be alleged the Jews are more open to false messiahs than other races or religions. The old adage, “Let those who live in glass houses...” should be remembered when reading the following information.

What then is the point of all this and the list of messianic claimants spanning 2,000 years? Simply this, it illustrates that the so-called “messianic template” was never taken seriously; it was never a *thing*. Individuals were accepted and hailed as *the* Messiah, rather than just a candidate for the position, despite the fact that the “criteria must be fulfilled *before* any person can be acknowledged as the Messiah.” And, in some cases, followers continued to believe in their messiah after he died, even though none of the “template’s” requisites had been fulfilled.

Why then did sages bother to formulate the “template’s” messianic requisites around 200 CE? If no one ever took it seriously, what good was it? I can only think of one reason, and I say this without being facetious, it seems that the “template’s” only use has been as a tool for arguing against the belief that Jesus is the Messiah. For example, the Jews for Judaism website has the “template” under the title: *Why Jesus is not the Messiah*. The “template” is all over the internet and YouTube in reference to Jesus as a pseudo-messiah, but ignored for 2,000 years, including today, regarding failed Jewish messiahs.

Ignoring the “template’s” existence in the case of Jewish messianic claimants is as much the norm today as it was nearly 2,000 years ago. In the article, *Did the Rebbe Identify Himself as the Messiah – and What Do His Hasidim Believe Today?* (<https://repository.yu.edu/items/5c9c34f8-f763-418e-b227-f04d411c8955>) Dr. David Berger alleges, based on statements made by Rabbi Schneerson, the “Rebbe” unequivocally indicated he was the Messiah and that the Messianic Age would occur without delay. Dr. Berger writes that the belief Rabbi Schneerson is the Messiah, violates all Jewish norms: “...no Jews at all believed... [the Messiah] might initiate a messianic mission in which he would promise imminent redemption and then die in an unredeemed world.” Berger says it an “absurd proposition that the Messiah... might be expected to provide the Jewish people with misleading information about the time of the redemption. Messiah son of David does not fail in his first attempt.”

Berger makes sense, but “sense” is nonsense in the face of messianic fervor. Messianic fervor trumps logic, and it trumps the “messianic template” every time, even today, even among tens of thousands of adherents of one of the largest and most influential Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Hasidic groups who know the “messianic template’s” eight requisites, probably by heart, but willfully ignore them when it comes to their *Messiah*. After 2,000 years, this has become something of a time honored tradition in Judaism.

NOTE: The list of pseudo-messiahs is based on different sources; the Christian Scriptures, Josephus, the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Jewish outreach websites like Chabad and Jews for Judaism, among others. Some individuals were omitted from the list because of controversy regarding them or because they were classified as a *prophet*, not a *messiah*. It is highly likely there were more pseudo-messiahs throughout the centuries than those in the following list. But 40 pseudos make the point as well as 60.

1st Century: Josephus, a 1st Century Jewish general and historian, describes the disturbances caused by military messiahs before the destruction of the Temple: “Deceivers and impostors, under the pretense of divine inspiration fostering

revolutionary changes... persuaded the multitude to act like madmen, and led them out into the desert under the belief that God would give them tokens of deliverance.”⁶² Josephus alludes to “ten thousand disorders,” indicating there were many more than the four military messiahs he specifically mentions.

1. Judas the Galilean led an insurrection against the Romans in 6 CE. Josephus mentions him, and also Gamaliel, an esteemed member of the Sanhedrin, as an example of a failed messianic movement.—Acts 5:37.

2. Theudas (1) started an insurrection with a following of about 400 men. His movement ended when he was put to death. Gamaliel mentioned Theudas in the context of failed messianic movements, as above. Theudas’ rebellion occurred sometime before the Sanhedrin debated the fate of the apostles in 37 CE.— Acts 5:36.

3. An Egyptian Jew is mentioned in Acts 21:38. A Roman commander asked Paul, “are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the assassins out into the wilderness?” Josephus also mentions this incident: “But Felix prevented his attempt [to revolt], and met him with his Roman soldiers... the Egyptian ran away... while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive.” Antonius Felix (ruled 52-60 CE) is known to have suppressed a revolt led by a Jewish messianic figure referred to as “Egyptian,” who could be the one mentioned by the Roman commander.

4. Theudas (2). Josephus mentions this Theudas twice. Around 44/46 CE, Theudas said he would divide the Jordan river and persuaded “a great part of the people” to take their belongings to the Jordan and traverse it. Historians understand Theudas’ actions as an affirmation of his messianic claim. The Romans, always on the alert for uprisings instigated by one Jewish messiah or another, sent soldiers who executed Theudas and killed many of his followers.

5. Dositheos the Samaritan (mid-1st century), tried to persuade the Samaritans that he was the Jewish Messiah.

6. Menahem ben Judah, mentioned by Josephus, attacked the fortress of Masada (66 CE), armed his followers with the weapons stored there, and proceeded to Jerusalem, where he captured the fortress Antonia. When the war broke out with Rome, he claimed leadership of all the troops as if he were a king. He was assassinated as the result of a conspiracy against him. His actions have led historians to understand he believed he was the Messiah, though there is debate whether he explicitly said he was.

2nd Century

7. Shimon Ben-Kosiba (Bar Kochba), led a revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 and 135 CE. His initial victories led Rabbi Akiva of Talmudic fame to proclaim him “Messiah-king,” and call him “Bar-Kochba” (“son of a star”), based on Numbers 24:17 (considered a messianic reference, though not a “template” requisite). Akiva was perceived as an Elijah figure backing the Messiah, Kosiba. “Although some... doubted his Messiahship, he seems to have carried the nation with him for his undertaking.” The rebellion taxed the power of Rome but still ended in defeat in 135 CE. Kosiba was killed in battle and Rabbi Akiva was tortured and executed. It was an unmitigated catastrophe. (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12416-pseudo-messiahs)

Jews still revere Kosiba as a Jewish hero, though, of course, not as the messiah. He is the first “messiah,” of only two, who had the backing of nearly all Jewry.

Kosiba claimed to be from the line of David, and he was obviously fighting to realize Israel’s national and religious aspirations. Outside of that, none of the other messianic requisites that were later codified support his being hailed *the* Messiah by anyone, much less by such a prestigious rabbi who, despite his catastrophic blunder, is still revered today.

5th Century

8. Moses of Crete, 448 CE, promised to lead the people from Crete to Palestine through the sea; a messianic gesture similar to Theudas (2). Many of his followers cast themselves into the sea at his command where some died, but Moses himself escaped. Talmudic calculations indicated “...that the Messiah was expected in 440 (Sanh. 97b), or in 471 (‘Ab. Zarah 9b),” and this, along with the disturbances in the Roman empire, “may have raised up the Messiah who appeared about this time in Crete.”—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Talmudic calculations were appealed to over the centuries as proof of messiahship, even though they are not part of the “template’s” requisites.

7th Century: The pseudo-Messiahs who came after Moses of Crete were mainly religious reformers and had a significant impact on Karaite Judaism.

9. An unnamed messianic claimant arose alongside the Muslim conquest of Khuzestan, a province of the Persian Empire.

10. Ishak ben Yakub claimed to be the last of five forerunners of the Messiah, toward the end of 7th Century, and to have been appointed by God to free Israel. He rebelled against the calif, but was defeated and slain. Some claimed ben Yakub himself was the Messiah and that he was inspired because “he wrote books, although he was ignorant of reading and writing.”—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Being the last in a line of holy individuals and writing a book though illiterate, are not mentioned anywhere as proof of messiahship.

8th Century

11. Yudghan, Ishak Yakub's disciple, declared himself a prophet in the first half of the 8th Century, and taught doctrines he “received from God.” His disciples regarded him as the Messiah. “After his death his followers formed a sect, the Yudghanites, who believed that their Messiah had not died, but would return.”—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Yudghan’s disciples accepted claims of divine inspiration and the belief that he would return after death, as proof of Yudghan’s messiahship even though these are not mentioned as messianic identifiers in the “template.”

12. An unnamed Messiah. In a letter to the Jewish community in Yemen, Maimonides mentioned “...a multitude of Jews, numbering hundreds of thousands... led by an individual who pretended to be the Messiah. They... slew all those that encountered them.” When they reached the vicinity of Baghdad Jewish sages convinced them to

disband. Maimonides' narrative fits the exploits of Abu Isa of Isfahan, 754-775, who convinced people to follow him because, "although illiterate, he managed to produce books." He gathered an army of 10,000 but was killed along with his men. "His followers believed that his death was an illusion and that in reality he had miraculously disappeared, an escape characteristic of other messianic pretenders whose return was eagerly awaited." The identification of Abu Isa with the individual mentioned by Maimonides is plausible, though there are some differences in the accounts.—

<https://torahinmotion.org/sites/default/files/programs/%D7%90%D7%92%D7%A8%D7%AA%20%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%9F%201.pdf>.

Here again, writing a book though illiterate, may be an impressive feat, but nowhere is it mentioned as proof of messiahship.

13. Serene was also a religious reformer in the first quarter of the 8th Century. "[This] Messiah promised the expulsion of the Mohammedans and the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land." (*Jewish Encyclopedia*) Serene was arrested and handed over to the Jews for punishment and his followers were received back into the fold.

The restoration of Israel, Serene's goal, is one of the proofs of messiahship in the "template," but only *after* it, and a number of other things, had been accomplished.

11th Century

14. An unnamed Messiah, mentioned by Maimonides in the letter to Yemen, appeared in Lyon, France (c. 1087). According to Maimonides, "He was supposed to have performed the following miracles: On moonlit nights he would go out and climb to the top of high trees in the field and glide from tree to tree like a bird. He cited a verse from Daniel to prove that such a miracle was within the power of the Messiah: 'And behold, there came with the clouds of heaven One like unto a son of man ... And there was given him dominion.' (Daniel 7:13-14) Many who witnessed the miracle became his votaries. The French... put many of his followers to death, together with the pretender."

The text alluded to in Daniel has nothing to do with airborne humans, and flying is definitely not mentioned as a proof of messiahship in the "template."

12th Century: The Crusades and the suffering these caused the Jewish communities were the backdrop to the rise in the number of messiahs in this period. Hardship and persecution produced a yearning for the messiah to appear and realize Israel's national aspirations.

15. Ibn Aryeh was chosen as messiah by local Jewish residents in the province of Córdoba, Spain (c. 1117) due to astrological calculations. In the letter to Yemen, Maimonides writes that the Jewish population, "...were all of one mind that the Messiah would appear that year... They picked a pious and virtuous person by the name of Ibn Aryeh who had been instructing the people.... When the influential and learned men of our community heard of this, they... had him flogged in public. Furthermore they imposed a fine upon him, and put him into the ban... They did the same thing to the persons who assembled about him."

Either the Jewish population were not aware of the "template," or they willfully ignored it when calculating messiah's appearance according to astronomical calculations, which the Talmud prohibits.—

16. An unnamed Messiah appeared in Yemen (1172). In his Letter to Yemen, Maimonides writes, "I do not believe that this man who has appeared among you possesses these [miraculous] powers [Jesus was alleged to possess]... The truth seems to be that he became melancholy and lost his mind. In my opinion, it is most advisable, both for your good and for his that you put him in iron chains for a while, until Gentiles learn that he is demented."

Maimonides mentions miraculous powers as something that could identify the Messiah, even though the "template" does not list such a thing as proof of messiahship.

17. David Alroy declared himself a Messiah in the last quarter of the 12th Century: "Asserting that he had been sent by God to free the Jews from the Mohammedan yoke and to lead them back to Jerusalem... he summoned the warlike Jews of... Azerbaijan and [those]... of Mosul and Bagdad to... assist in the capture of Amadia.... His movement failed, and he is said to have been assassinated, while asleep." Alroy's many followers "formed a sect called the Menahemists, from the Messianic name 'Menahem,' assumed by their founder."—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

The name Menahem is given importance as a sign that its possessor is the Messiah, though this is obviously not mentioned in the "template." The fact that his followers formed a sect around him after his death, indicates they continued to believe he was the Messiah.

13th Century: Jewish mysticism in Spain, based on the Kabbalah (which includes the Zohar and other mystical works), fostered virtually all messianic pretensions from this time forward and is still the basis for them today. Kabbalistic teachings, especially the transmigration and superfetation of souls were central to the claim of many messianic pretenders. Indeed, Jewish mysticism is part and parcel of every Hasidic group. About 500,000 belong to one of the many Hasidic groups around the world. There are nine major Hasidic groups, Satmar being the largest numerically, and Chabad the most widespread.

18. Rabbi Abraham Abulafia was an early Spanish Kabbalist, "one of the most important mystical teachers in the history of Kabbalah, and the founder of the school of 'Prophetic Kabbalah.'" (Daily Zohar website) He taught that the highest goal of Kabbalah is "prophetism," a degree of communion with God, which is attained especially by the close study of the four-lettered name of God, YHWH (Yahweh/Jehovah), and also by gematria (symbolical employment of letters as numerals).

After travelling to Italy, "...in obedience to an inner voice to convert the Pope," he journeyed to Sicily and settled in Messina, where he had numerous disciples, including Rabbi Gikatilla, he preached the Messiah would arrive in 1290. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "...he was thoroughly convinced of his prophetic mission, and considered himself to be the God-sent Messiah and Son of God." In his writings, Rabbi Abulafia referred to himself as *mashiach*, Hebrew for messiah or anointed one. His end is unknown. The reverence still accorded him is evidenced by the closing remarks of the

Daily Zohar website: "May the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Abulafia protect us all, Amen."—<https://dailyzohar.com/tzadikim/128-Rabbi-Avraham-Abulafia>.

Hearing voices and Kabbalistic teachings such as the transmigration and superfetation of souls, and gematria are not mentioned in the "template" as proof of messiahship.

19. Abraham of Avila (possibly the same as Nissim ben Abraham), was a pseudo-Messiah and wonder worker, at the end of the thirteenth century. He was influenced by the Kabbalistic teachings of Rabbi Abulafia, who he had met in Mesina, Sicily. Though illiterate he claimed to have written a voluminous commentary due to the intervention of an angel. "The community turned to Rabbi Solomon ben Adret, the greatest rabbinical authority of that day, for advice... Adret expressed strong doubts as to his prophetic gifts. Prophecy, he said, did not rest upon an ignorant man, nor was it a time for prophetic inspiration; furthermore, the prophetic gift was given by God in Palestine exclusively... Adret urged care and further investigation into the reputed miracles." Abraham also claimed the Messianic Age would begin on the last day of the fourth month of the year 1295 and the people assembled in the synagogue in white garments customarily used on the Day of Atonement.—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Once again, *wonderworking* and the writings of a professed illiterate are alleged as proof of messiahship and accepted by many. However, the assessment of Rabbi Adret is of special interest. He gives three reasons why caution should be exercised regarding Abraham's "prophetic gifts." Despite Rabbi Adret being "the greatest rabbinical authority of that day," none of the three reasons he gives against Abraham's messiahship are mentioned in the "template," and he makes no mention of any of the eight messianic requisites that are mentioned there.

15th Century

20. Rabbi Moses Botarel, active around 1413, came forward with Messianic pretensions. One of partizans was Hasdai Crescas, leader of the Jewish community in Aragon and influential in all of Spain.—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

The account does not say why Rabbi Crescas, one of the most influential Jewish leaders in Spain at the time, believed Rabbi Botarel was the Messiah. Either he ignored the existence of the "template," forgot it existed, or rejected it in favor of some other criteria. Whatever the case, it is clear the rabbi did not refer to the "template." Had he done so, he would not have become a partizan of Botarel; one of his strong supporters.

16th Century

21. Solomon Molko was influenced by David Reubeni who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. He migrated to Turkey from Portugal where he studied the Kabala and then "wandered as a preacher, through Palestine, where he achieved a great reputation and announced that the Messianic kingdom would come in 1540." He eventually returned to Europe and proclaimed that he himself was "the Messiah, or his precursor." (*Jewish Encyclopedia*) He was finally imprisoned by Emperor Charles V and sentenced to death by fire.

The account is vague as to why Molko was accepted as Messiah other than the fact he predicted when the Messianic Kingdom would come. Predicting something is not a messianic requisite in the "template."

22. Rabbi Isaac Luria was the esteemed founder of the modern school of Kabbalah. He taught the transmigration of souls as well as the superfetation of souls. He claimed to possess the soul of the Messiah of the house of Joseph and his mission was to hasten the coming of the Messiah son of David (the second in the two-messiahs belief) through the mystic improvement of souls. He taught in Safed, Israel, and revealed his Messiahship secretly to his disciples. "He believed that the Messianic era would commence in the beginning of the second half of the second day (of the year 1000) after the destruction of the Temple... in 1568." He died in 1572 and, "...tens of thousands make the pilgrimage to his gravesite [in Safed] every year... Rabbi Luria is commonly known as the Ari, an acronym standing for *Eloki Rabbi Yitzchak*, 'the G-dly Rabbi Isaac.'"—Chabad website.

Receiving a second soul, irrespective of whose it may have been, is not one of the requisites mentioned in the "template," though it becomes of paramount importance from this point on. Not only is predicting the Messianic Age not a proof of messiahship in the "template," it should have been a wakeup call that something was not right with the one predicting, because, without exception, they all failed.

23. An unnamed Messiah is reported to have appeared in Coromandel in 1615.—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

24. Rabbi Chayim Vital was a pupil and successor of Rabbi Isaac Luria. He began giving cabalistic lectures in 1576, declaring himself to be the Messiah ben Joseph, and is said to have performed many miracles while wandering through Syria and Egypt; such as summoning spirits by the power of magic formulas. He died in 1620.

Neither miracles nor summoning spirits by magic formulas were ever part of the messianic requisites despite their being embraced as *proofs* of messiahship by rabbis and the Jewish public at large.

25. Abraham Shalom was a pretender to the Davidic Messiahship (the second messiah in the two-messiahs belief), and wrote to Rabbi Vital in 1574 saying "that Vital was the Messiah of the house of Joseph." Shalom died toward the end of the 16th Century.—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

The account does not mention the basis for Shalom's claim, but one can speculate that it likely had something to do with the Kabbalistic teaching of transmigration or superfetation of souls.

17th Century: Shabtai Tzvi began a movement mid-century which ended in disaster for the Jewish community worldwide. For some 200 years after Tzvi, those from his movement, or an offshoot of it, dominated the horizon of messianic claimants. Though his followers became an aberration of Judaism, they still shared the same Kabbalistic foundation that had permeated Jewish Orthodoxy since the 13th Century, so their alleged reasons for messiahship were basically the same.

26. Rabbi Shabtai Tzvi, 1626-1676, was the most famous *messiah* in the Middle Ages. He was the second and last, to be accepted as the Messiah by virtually the entire Jewish world. He was born in Smyrna, Turkey, and entered rabbinical studies under Joseph Escapa, an illustrious Rabbi. Though he left the Yeshiva at fifteen, he was ordained three years later as "hacham," wise one, or rabbi.

Tzvi suffered from psychotic episodes and disparaged the Torah in favor of his own ideas and bizarre rituals during moments of euphoria. He advocated the paradoxical philosophy of “holy deeds through sinning,” and was obsessed with pronouncing the name of God, which may have been an interpretation of Rabbi Abulafia’s Kabbalistic teachings. He declared publicly that he was the Messiah in May of 1665. And only a few months later, in October, reports of Tzvi “the Messiah,” swept across Europe. It was claimed he had divine visions, performed miracles, that he could fly, and that he pronounced God’s personal name. He married a prostitute in imitation of the prophet Hosea. Jewish communities from all parts of Europe sent groups of emissaries to Turkey to pay homage to the one referred to as “our King.”

Within a year, in September of 1666, Tzvi was summoned to Constantinople by the Sultan and was given the choice of conversion to Islam or execution... he chose the former. His conversion had a devastating effect on the Jewish community, though some followers maintained that his conversion to Islam was only superficial and Tzvi was continuing his true work in secret. Many followed his example and converted to Islam. They continued to believe Tzvi was the messiah and secretly practiced a form of Judaism.

Tzvi continued to believe he was the Messiah until his death in 1676. Nathan of Gaza, an Elijah figure for Tzvi *the Messiah*, spread the idea that Tzvi had ascended to heaven and was deified. (*Jewish Encyclopedia*) It is said that a small, secretive, community of his followers, called Dönme, still survives in Istanbul.—

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/turkish-jewrys-secret-medieval-messianics-survive-456030>.

Since Tzvi was obviously deranged there is no need dwelling on his actions. The main question concerns his followers, especially the rabbis who followed him. Since Tzvi’s actions and bizarre claims were public knowledge the religious leaders should have been aware nothing alleged as proof of his messiahship fit the “messianic template”; not flying, nor miracles, or imitating the marriage of a past prophet. Aside from that, there were the negative aspects; he disparaged the Torah, pronounced God’s name in public (which the Talmud prohibited), he was openly immoral and promoted immorality. All of this begs the question: Why did the rabbis and sages close a blind eye to all of that and lead virtually the entire Jewish community worldwide to hail Tzvi as the messianic “King?” The answer is: The expectation of finally seeing the fulfillment of Jewish national aspirations was paramount and nothing else mattered. In the face of this expectation, consulting a list of messianic requirements, a “messianic template,” was never considered.

27. Jacob Querido became the head of the Shabbateans in Salonica, Greece. His sister, Tzvi’s last wife, claimed that her brother was the recipient of Tzvi’s soul. Querido’s father, Rabbi Joseph Filosof, and Rabbi Solomon Florentin, supported these assertions. Querido and 400 followers allegedly converted to Islam in 1687, as Tzvi had done previously. He died in 1690.

The rabbis embraced as *Messiah* someone who claimed to receive the soul of a supposed *Messiah* who could not possibly have been one. They had no interest in the “template.”

28. Mordecai Mokia, born in Alsace about 1650, declared he was the Davidic Messiah. He maintained that, because he was poor, he was the real Messiah and also the incarnation of Tzvi's soul. He taught that Tzvi was only the "Messiah son of Joseph" and could not accomplish the redemption of Israel because he was rich. Around 1678, the Rabbi of Reggio and other famous Italian kabbalists, invited Mokia to Italy where he enjoyed great popularity. He made a preaching tour through Austria, Germany, and Poland, returning finally to Hungary where he died in 1729. A sect of his followers existed for quite some time there.

The events surrounding Mokia are predictable; he is embraced by important rabbis because he claims to be the incarnation of Tzvi's soul and an accomplished Kabbalist. The Kabbalah held precedence over all other considerations when it came to identifying the messiah.

29. Abraham Miguel Cardoso was a well-educated Spanish leader of the Shabbatean movement who had acquired considerable rabbinic knowledge studying under the rabbis of Venice. For a time he presented himself as a prophet of Shabtai Tzvi and "justified Tzvi's treason, saying that it was necessary for the Messiah to be reckoned among the sinners in order to atone for Israel's idolatry. He applied Isa. 53 to Shabbethai, and sent out epistles to prove that Shabbethai was the true Messiah." (*Jewish Encyclopedia*) Around 1680 he began to claim that he was the "Messiah son of Joseph." Many rabbinic scholars and rabbis became his followers, but others opposed him. He preached and wrote prolifically about the speedy coming of the messiah, fixing different dates as each one failed. He died in 1706 at the hands of his nephew during a family quarrel.

If the requisites of the "messianic template" were as well-known as Jewish outreach groups would have us believe, would "many rabbinic scholars and rabbis" have become followers of Cardoso?

18th Century

30. Barukhia Russo was proclaimed a new incarnation of Tzvi in 1700 in Turkey. The Shabbateans that followed Russo became even more radical in terms of sexual freedoms and even justified incest, something unequivocally prohibited in the Tanakh. Some of his followers made missionary journeys to Poland, Austria and Germany. Barukhia's influence led to a new movement in Poland, headed by Jacob Frank (below).

The account does not say that rabbis became followers of Russo, but his messianic claims were grounded in the Kabbalah and particularly in its teachings of the transmigration and superfetation of souls, a rabbinic invention that paved the way for many to become his followers.

31. Berokia, son of Barukhia Russo, succeeded his father and was similarly regarded as Messiah and successor of Shabtai Tzvi. He died in 1740.

32. Lobe Prossnitz taught that God had handed over the dominion of the world to "pious" men, those who entered into the depths of Kabala. He claimed that Shabtai Tzvi's soul had passed into Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz and then to himself. He died in 1750.

Prossnitz's story follows the pattern of messianic claims based solely on the Kabbalistic teaching of transmigration of souls.

33. Isaiah Hasid, born in Ukraine, was a follower of Prossnitz, although he publicly repudiated the Shabbateans. Later, however, he secretly claimed that he was the resurrected Messiah. In 1725, Hasid and Meir Kamenker, also a Shabbatean, "disseminated writings condemning the Talmud and hinting that adherents of the Talmud did not believe in the God of Israel." The rabbis of Frankfurt found out, excommunicated them both, and made the ban known in many Jewish communities.—*Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Hasid and Kamenker were excommunicated because they were Shabbateans disseminating propaganda against the Talmud and those who believed it, not because Hasid claimed to be the Messiah.

34. Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, an Italian rabbi known for his Kabbalistic writings, became convinced he was the Messiah and declared the purpose of a code of study he had developed was the redemption of Israel. He also claimed to be the recipient of divine revelations and claimed to have conversed with Moses, Abraham and Elijah, among others, all of whom told him he was their mentor. He died of a plague in Palestine in 1747. Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, among the most important rabbis in Jewish history, praised Luzzatto's writing and reportedly said he would have walked from Vilna to learn at Luzzatto's feet if he were still alive. The rabbi's statement was serious praise; it would have been a trek of nearly 3,000 miles from Vilnius, Poland, to Israel!

Many of Rabbi Luzzatto's claims were similar to the Shabbateans; mysticism, divine revelations, and conversing with the spirits, none of which are mentioned in the "template" as proof of messiahship. Rather than heaping praise on Luzzatto's writings, Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, the Vilna Gaon (genius or great one), should have denounced his messianic claims.—<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/moses-hayyim-luzzatto/>.

35. Jacob Frank was a Shabbatean as a youth, in Podolia, Poland. He was charismatic and gained a reputation as a prophet. "He taught that... the same Messiah soul had dwelt in David, Elijah, Jesus, Mohammed, Shabbethai Zebi and his followers to Berechiah, and finally in him (Frank)." He also taught that he was God in corporeal form. Like Tzvi, he taught "purification through transgression," marked by extreme libertine behavior. Frank's followers claimed he performed miracles, and even prayed to him.

Frank converted to Islam in 1757 and, two years later, he became a Catholic to avoid persecution, following about 1,000 of his followers. He secretly continued to teach that he was the Messiah while publicly presenting his teachings as Catholic theology. Six of Frank's followers who were Catholic converts confessed they believed Frank was the living incarnation of God. Frank was arrested and imprisoned for heresy. Even in prison, however, he remained the head of his sect. He died in Germany in 1791.—*Frank, Jacob, and the Frankists, Jewish Encyclopedia*.

36. Eve Frank was Jacob Frank's daughter. In 1770 she was declared to be the incarnation of the Shekinah (referring to God's presence), the female aspect of God, as well as the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary. She thus became the object of a small cult in Częstochowa, a city in southern Poland. She died in 1817 with the distinction of having been the only female Jewish messiah and the last of the Shabbatean messiahs.

19th century: Around the mid-1800s, *messiahs* from Orthodox Judaism began to appear once again. Their messianic claims were also founded on the Kabbalah, like the Shabbateans and the Kabbalists before them,.

37. Shukr ben Salim Kuhayl (1) was a Yemenite messianic claimant of the 19th century at a time when political turmoil had predisposed the Jewish community to messianic expectations. In 1859, Kuhayl, who was well versed in Kabbalah, became an itinerant preacher exhorting the Jews to repent. At first he claimed to be a messenger of the Messiah but later indicated that he was the Messiah himself. According to an article in the Jerusalem press, almost all the Jews of Yemen believed the messianic claims of Kuhayl. He was killed shortly thereafter in 1863, apparently at the direction of the Imam controlling the capital of San'a. Many of his followers did not believe he had died, and expected his imminent return.

Little information is provided about Kuhayl or why almost all the Jews of Yemen believed he was the Messiah. It is clear, however, those who accepted his claims were either unaware of the “template,” or didn’t consider it important. This is another case where followers of a messiah refuse to accept that he died. This left them and others in distant lands, vulnerable to abuses.

38. Judah ben Shalom, a.k.a. Shukr ben Salim Kuhayl (2), claimed to be the transfiguration of the former Shukr Kuhayl. His messianic movement attracted both Yemenite Jews and Arabs between 1868 and 1870. He was reportedly a greedy and arrogant conman. He demanded tithes from his followers and established a vast fundraising network. He had many zealous disciples throughout Yemen, Aden, Egypt, India and even in what is now Israel. He was eventually arrested because of financial irregularities. After his release from prison he died in solitude in San'a, Yemen, in 1878.

The acceptance of charlatans is an old story, and still occurs all the time among people of different religions and races. Shalom’s case is striking because so many Jews in many lands were induced to embrace him as *the* Messiah due to the fervent belief of Yemenite Jews who said the original Kuhayl had not died. Either there was an international ignorance of the “template,” or a willful rejection of it on the part of the Jewish population in all those countries that put faith in Shalom in the belief that he was a *transfigured* Kuhayl.

20th century

39. Moses Guibbory was born in Ukraine, eventually migrated to Jerusalem, and lived as a hermit in a complex of tombs in Northern Jerusalem in the early 40s(?). A few years later he declared he was the messiah and a prophet after correctly predicting an earthquake. Some prominent Jewish Americans became zealous disciples and formed a group of Guibbory’s followers in the US. Guibbory eventually became convinced he had supreme powers and began referring to himself as God. He became increasingly mentally unstable, and his movement collapsed. He faded into obscurity and died in 1985.

In the early 40s, a follower of Guibbory told Hillel Zeitlin, about him. Zeitlin, a religious “scholar, [and] a famed writer,” pointed out a passage in a book in Aramaic and said, “Kabbalistically, it is written in this ancient volume that a man by the name of Moshe would appear at this particular time in a Jerusalem cave.” As an Orthodox scholar, Zeitlin could have reached for the “template” and immediately discounted Guibbory’s

messianic claims, but he consulted a Kabbalistic work instead that had a “prophecy.” His chosen means of identifying the Messiah had nothing to do with a “messianic template.” His actions were consistent with those prior to him looking to identify the Messiah.—<https://www.jewishpress.com/sections/features/features-on-jewish-world/a-mysterious-self-proclaimed-jewish-messiah/2024/11/08/>.

40. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, “The Rebbe,” was the 7th leader of the Lubavitcher (Chabad) movement in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, NY, from 1951 until his death in 1994. Schneerson began to be viewed as the messiah as far back as 1965. The idea gained momentum during the last years of his life, and it is reported that he did not disparage this view in private, though he never said it publicly. The number of those believing he is *the* Messiah has grown since his death. Many Chabad members and rabbis, as well as non-Lubavitcher rabbis, believe that Schneerson was resurrected and will return in power. Some believe he never really died, and some even believe he is God. Dr. Berger, mentioned earlier, says the expression, “avinu malkenu” (our father our king) – a term reserved for God – has been used in reference to “the Rebbe.” Dr. Berger also alleges it is likely that “a majority of full-fledged Lubavitch Hasidim,” believe in the Rebbe's messiahship, and affirm he is *pure divinity*... Oy vey!⁶³

Rabbi Schneerson claimed to be in David's line of descent and worked toward the restoration of Israel. Those points square with the “template.” Apart from that, his story is reminiscent of previous *messiahs*; the last in a line of holy men, messianic claims, failed predictions that the Messianic Age would come “immediately,” the significance of the name “Menahem,” and tens of thousands of adherents who believe he is still the Messiah even after he has died, despite the fact the Temple has not been rebuilt, the Jews have not been regathered to Israel, etc. Also, many followers deny that the “Rebbe” died, or accept that he died and say he is now “more than God.” None of this squares with the “template.”

Adherents of Chabad will readily use the “messianic template” to show why Jesus is not the Messiah, but ignore its requisites when examining the qualifications of *their* Messiah.

Conclusion: The above has been a tedious review, but necessary in order to substantiate the conclusion: Historically there is no mention of a “messianic template,” or anything like it, having ever been adduced or consulted by sages, rabbis, or the Jewish population, to vet the claims of messianic pretenders during two millennia of Jewish history. Whether the “template” was merely disregarded or unknown, there is no record of it ever being consulted in the case of any pseudo-messiah that ever appeared. Numerous *extra*-“template” factors were accepted as “proof” of so and so's messiahship and rabbis who opposed them offered *extra*-“template” reasons why they should be rejected. For all intents and purposes of messiah vetting, the so-called “messianic template” did not exist. It was AWOL.

In retrospect, *Two-Thousand Years of Jewish Messiahs* substantiates what historian Schurer wrote about the sages who, in 200 CE, reformulated “in detail the whole circle of religious ideas, and especially the Messianic expectations.” Despite their efforts, “...the details of Messianic theology... never became really binding like the details of the law... so that the Messianic hope was always fluctuating... Even in later times, *the old hope of a glorious future for the nation maintained the supremacy*” (Italics in the original).—Endnote 56.

Two messiahs have been embraced by the Jewish people – including renowned sages and rabbis – both ending in disaster; Shimon ben Kosiba (Bar Kokhba) in the 2nd Century, and Shabtai Tzvi in the 17th Century. In each case, it was “the old hope of a glorious future for the nation,” and the dream that *this time it really could happen*, that led to the embrace of these messiahs. The “old hope... maintained supremacy” and, for the vast majority, nothing else mattered or deterred them. Certainly not the few voices of sanity issuing warnings, nor the immorality, the bizarre behavior or disparaging the Torah. And, least of all did the “template” matter.

Messianic fervor so imbued believers and clouded their thinking abilities they were willing to face certain death battling against Rome’s war machine, willing to throw themselves into the Jordan at the *Messiah’s* command, willing to believe preposterous stories of flying messiahs, and willing, even eager, to subject themselves to the material and sexual abuses of unscrupulous messianic pretenders. And the reason for such sacrifices sometimes rested on nothing more solid than a report disseminated by people in a foreign land. Over a period of 2,000 years, a hundred ways to test messianic claims were invented, but no one ever pulled out a copy of the “template” to do so.

Both Kosiba and Tzvi were hailed and embraced universally as *the* Messiah even though the Jews had not been ingathered and returned to Israel; without a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem; without worldwide peace and an end of war; without a Messiah reigning as King at a time when all the Jewish people were observing God’s commandments; and despite the people of the world not serving the one true God.—“Messianic template,” requisites 4-8.

If only one thing is clear from the history of false messiahs, it’s this: *The old hope of a glorious future*, Jewish national aspirations, rather than a so-called “messianic template,” or anything resembling one, has always been the underlying reason for embracing a messiah.

Jewish national aspirations, as perceived by the religious leaders in the 1st Century, were the reason Jesus was rejected. Jesus’ unforgivable sin was that his goals were spiritual rather than religiopolitical. In a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the chief priest and Pharisees said, “If we let him alone this way, they will all put faith in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” (John 11:48) Well, in the end, the Romans did exactly what the rabbis feared despite their having done away with Jesus.

When confronted with someone like Yakov who alleges, “The template for the messiah is very clear in the Tanakh and Jesus did not fulfill any of these expectations.” I can only reply, “Seriously? I mean, seriously.”

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

A FINAL OBSERVATION : Ironically, those who believe Rabbi Schneerson was resurrected to heaven after his death and is now God, or even “more than God,” are accepted in Judaism and granted Israeli citizenship when they immigrate. On the other hand, Jewish Christians who believe the same thing about Jesus are repudiated and refused Israeli citizenship. Just toggle the name from Schneerson to Jesus and you pretty much have the same thing.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov: “It almost seems like the Jesus story was happening in a parallel universe to what was happening to the Jews on a day-to-day basis under Herod & Rome... [It] was so inconspicuous an event that the contemporaries of Jesus hardly noticed it... and by the time that Christianity had become a great and powerful sect, the “Sages of the Talmud” were already far removed from the time of Jesus, and no longer remembered in their true shape the historical events.

Answer: You don’t explain why you believe, “the contemporaries of Jesus hardly noticed” him, but Jewish outreach sources have made similar statements because references to Jesus in the Talmud are few and quite distorted. However, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, Jesus did have an impact on the religious leaders of his day: “[the Talmud] “belittle[s] the person of Jesus by ascribing to him illegitimate birth, magic, and a shameful death.” The foregoing statement notwithstanding, controversy surrounding this issue continues.

There are several reasons why so few Talmudic references to Jesus exist. Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 CE is one factor. The effect on Judaism was devastating; the Temple was destroyed, the system of sacrifices disrupted, the priesthood terminated, 1.1 million killed and 97,000 taken captive (according to Josephus). Judaism, as it had been practiced for a millennium and a half, vanished overnight. And then, after the Bar Kokhba revolt was crushed by the Romans in 135 CE, Jews were totally banned from living in Jerusalem. Judaism needed to be reinvented if it was to survive, which meant reconstructing Jewish religious and political life in its entirety. So, it could be that the Jewish sages focused their energies on matters of greater immediate concern than recording what happened with Jesus and his followers. As mentioned earlier, Schurer says, “...[the scribes] worked at and settled in detail the whole circle of religious ideas, and especially the Messianic expectations.”—See Endnote 56.⁶⁴

On another note, Israeli scholar Pinchas Lapide says, “[it is] more than likely that Jesus originally had a much greater impact on rabbinical literature than the fragments we have today bear witness to... Talmudic passages about Jesus... were mutilated, distorted, or obliterated by church censors... What escaped the censor’s scissors, and the bonfire of Talmudic burnings soon fell victim to rabbinical self-censorship.⁶⁵ Because of the Talmudic burnings and censorship, Jesus’ impact on the Jewish religious leaders is generally underestimated.

Compounding the problem is the lack of scholarly consensus on whether the Talmudic references are in response to Jesus and his followers in the 1st Century, Christians in the 3rd Century, or whether the references are about Jesus or some other individuals. The Talmud is therefore little help in understanding how 1st Century religious leaders viewed Jesus and his movement. The most reliable source of information is therefore the Christian Scriptures.

The Christian Scriptures are clear that the religious leaders in Jesus day viewed him as an existential threat.

- **John 12:19** “So the **Pharisees said** among themselves: ‘You see that you are not getting anywhere. Look! **The whole world has gone after him.**’”
 - By the end of Jesus’ brief ministry, the religious leaders had come to view Jesus and his movement as a threat.
- **John 11:47, 48; 12:10, 11** “So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Sanhedrin together and said: ‘What are we to do, for this man performs many signs? 48 **If we let him go on this way, they will all put faith in him, and the**

Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation'... 12:10

The chief priests now conspired to kill Lazarus also,¹¹ since it was because of him that many of the Jews were going there and putting faith in Jesus.

- Jewish national aspirations allowed for “military” messiahs, but not for one like Jesus who would not take up arms against Rome.
- **Luke 23:2** “Then they began to accuse him, saying: ‘We found this man **subverting our nation**, forbidding the paying of taxes to Caesar, and saying he himself is Christ a king.’”
 - False witnesses were procured to ensure Jesus was condemned; an act of desperation revealing the mindset of the religious leaders.
- **John 19:15** “Pilate said to them: “Shall I execute your king?” The chief priests answered: ‘We have no king but Caesar.’”
 - This was a blatant contradiction of Jewish nationalistic aspirations expressed by the chief priests in John 11:48.
- **“Matthew 27:64** Therefore, command that the grave be made secure until the third day, so that his disciples may not come and steal him and say to the people, ‘He was raised up from the dead!’ Then this last deception will be worse than the first.”

Persecution of Christians following Jesus’ execution.

- **Acts 5:28** [The high priest] said: “We strictly ordered you not to keep teaching on the basis of this name, and yet look! **you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...**”
- **Acts 8:1, 4** “On that day [when a mob stoned Stephen] **great persecution arose against the congregation that was in Jerusalem...** 4 However, those who had been scattered went through the land declaring the good news of the word.”

“In dangers from my own race.” (2 Corinthians 11:26) Paul and his companions were dogged and persecuted from city to city.

- Paul’s 1st missionary tour (47 CE):
 - Paul and Barnabas were thrown out of **Antioch** in Pisidia at the instigation of the Jews. (Ac 13:44-50) Then crowds were incited against them in **Iconium**, and again in **Lystra**, when Jews from Iconium and Pisidium turned the pagan crowds against Paul, stoning him and leaving him for dead.
- Paul’s 2nd missionary tour (49 CE):
 - Paul was forced to leave **Thessalonica** because of a mob formed by the Jews (Acts 17:1-5) and then **Beroea** because Jews from Thessalonica caused trouble there. (Acts 17:10-14) Jews in **Corinth** accused Paul before the city proconsul.—Acts 18:1, 12-16.
- Jerusalem (56 CE):
 - Jews from Asia stirred up a mob against Paul while he was in the **Temple**, and he had to be rescued by Roman soldiers. (Ac 21:26-31) Then, with the approval of the chief priests and elders, 40 men **plotted to assassinate** Paul when he was transferred to Caesarea.—Acts 23:12-21.
- Caesarea (56-58 CE):
 - The High Priest and others went to **Caesarea**, to accuse Paul before the governor of stirring up sedition and attempting to profane the temple. (Acts 24:1, 5, 6) **Two years later**, the chief priests and principal men **renewed efforts** to have Paul punished and **planned to assassinate** him if they could get the new Governor to bring him to Jerusalem. —Acts 25:2-7.

Why such unrelenting persecution?

- If, as Klausner says, “Jesus was a Jew and a Jew he remained till his last breath,” why did the religious leaders feel so threatened and harbor such animosity toward him and his followers? Klausner mentions what may be the reason, at least in part: “[Jesus’ teaching] brought Judaism to such an extreme that it became in a sense, *non-Judaism*.”⁶⁶
 - In other words, Jesus was taking Judaism to an unacceptable extreme. But was he really that radical, or was it the religious *norm* that had deviated so far from Judaism’s origins that it made Jesus *seem* radical to the religious leaders? Though Jesus did not advocate armed rebellion, he was certainly no more “extreme” than Jeremiah who advocated wholesale capitulation to the Babylonians.
 - In the end, it was *normative* Judaism, with its nationalistic aspirations flamed by the fervor of messianic misconceptions, that brought about the catastrophic end of the entire Jewish system in 70 CE. Ironically, had the nation embraced Jesus, destruction by the Romans would have been averted and the city and Temple would have remained intact.

Josephus

- Writing around 93 CE, Josephus mentions Jesus twice, as well as John the Baptist and James, Jesus’ brother. Some feel the references to Jesus may be a Christian interpolations, but the other references are less disputed.
- The reference to James supports the general picture of religious opposition seen in the above quotations since it deals with the condemnation of James by the Sanhedrin and his execution in 62 CE.
- Josephus also mentions some of the same false messiahs mentioned in the Christian Scriptures, which supports the historical accuracy of the Christian Scriptures.

As far as Jesus was concerned, regardless of how others might categorize his work and teaching, he carried out God’s will and not his own. He took on his assigned mission knowing from day one what the consequences would be, and he was pleased with what he accomplished.

- **Luke 12:49** “I came to start a fire on the earth, and what more is there for me to wish if it has already been lit?”

Historian Will Durant (a declared non-Christian) wrote, “That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels.”⁶⁷

In view of the above, it is scarcely credible to imagine that Jesus and the movement he nurtured would have passed benignly through the Jewish cities and countryside unnoticed and without causing the deep anguish and consternation among Israel’s religious leaders exactly as portrayed in the Christian Scriptures.

∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov: Rabbis, and a secular source I read, refer to “Jesus the Christian Messiah,” not the Jewish Messiah, and I completely agree based on statements like, “my kingdom is not of this world”, “born of a virgin without a father to give the tribe”, “die for the sins of the others”, “do miracles”, “not anointed as a king or rule on the throne”....

Answer: Jesus could not have been a *Christian Messiah* because Christianity didn't exist in his lifetime. Jesus was Jewish and can only be understood in a Jewish context. According to historian Klausner, "Jesus was a Jew in all his sayings and ways: he observed all the ceremonial laws; as a true Jew he looked upon God as his heavenly father; he had compassion on the poor, helped the fallen, and rated the repentant more highly than the scrupulously pious... Jesus is the most Jewish of Jews, more Jewish... even than Hillel."⁶⁸ To insinuate that Jesus was anything other than a Jewish Messiah causes an unjustifiable crisis of identity: If not a Jew, then what?

∞ ∞ ∞

"JESUS IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANTISEMITISM AND JEWISH PERSECUTION"

Yakov: Lon you are too kind to Christians. Shall I send you the passages where Jesus triggers the 2000-year-old antisemitism? If you don't agree with this, then you must agree that the Greek text is not the word of god.

Answer: Anyone who knows even a little about history, understands that the responsibility for the persecution of Jews cannot rightly be laid at the feet of Jesus and the first Christians. Those who persecuted Jews in the name of Christ were not true disciples nor were they following any command given by Jesus. Referring to false Christians Jesus said, "I never knew you, get away from me you workers of lawlessness."—Matthew 7:23.

In *Israelis, Jews and Jesus*, Pinchas Lapide writes, "In the name of the gospel innumerable Jews have been murdered. Nobody will deny that. But we must not forget that every idea, even the noblest and most universal, changes in the course of its development and is usually distorted both in form and substance — until finally it often degenerates into its antithesis... we can blame neither Jesus nor his disciples for this estrangement of Christianity from its true self, much less for the monstrous crimes which the churches have committed in the name of Jesus against his brothers."⁶⁹

Jewish historian Klausner writes: "If we... preserved only the moral precepts and parables, the Gospels would count as one of the most wonderful collections of ethical teaching in the world."⁷⁰ Klausner classifies Jesus' teachings as "ethical," knowing that they could never be the basis for violence against the Jews or anyone else.

Jesus' preaching was in line with the Jewish prophets; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Malachi and Zechariah. Except that the prophets were much tougher on the Jewish religious leaders and the people in general than Jesus was. In Matthew chapter 23, Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees but not the Jewish people in general, whereas the previous prophets condemned the general populace in very harsh terms.

Revelation 3:9 says: "Look! I will make those from the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews yet are not, but are lying—look! I will make them come and bow before your feet and make them know that I have loved you." This is a condemnation of false Jews and is very much in line with the prophets of old.

- **Jeremiah 6:13, 15** "For from the least to the greatest, each one is making dishonest gain; From the prophet to the priest, each one is practicing fraud... Do they feel ashamed of the detestable things they have done? They feel no shame at all! They do not even know how to feel humiliated!"

- **Jeremiah 7:9, 10** “Can you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make sacrifices to Baal, and follow after gods you had not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house that bears my name and say, ‘We will be saved,’ despite you’re doing all these detestable things?”
- **Jeremiah 9:2-5** “I would leave my people... for they are all adulterers, a band of treacherous people. 3 They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood, not faithfulness, prevails in the land. They advance from evil to evil, And they pay no attention to me, declares Jehovah... 4 For every brother is a betrayer, and every neighbor is a slanderer. 5 Each one cheats his neighbor, and no one speaks truth. They have taught their tongue to speak falsehood. They wear themselves out doing what is wrong.”

Jesus’ condemnation of the religious leaders of his day was justified, but even so, it was far less caustic than Jeremiah’s and other prophets, and not very different from that found in the Talmud (Sota III 4; Baraita Sota 22b; Pesikta Rabbati, par. 22).—See Endnote 70.

Jesus taught his disciples to *pray for those persecuting them*, and to *turn the other cheek*. His immediate followers adhered to that command. Paul wrote, “vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay,” ‘bless those who persecute and do not curse them.’” (Romans 12:17-20) This precludes the idea that Jesus’ teachings would lead coherent Christians to retaliate or persecute anyone or any group. The manufacturer of a butter knife is not responsible if someone stabs another with it... he made a butter knife, not a weapon!

∞ ∞ ∞

“JESUS’ CONDEMNATION OF THE PHARISEES WAS OVER THE TOP”

Yakov: Do you really think the Pharisees during the 1st Century CE were evil? There were great sages during this time, and I think one of the Gospels or Acts mentions one of the sages, Gamaliel.

When I was young, I worked as a scientist on Space Research and the work was so awesome I used to skip lunch and dinner. My mother used to get up at 5 AM and prepare my lunch to make sure I did not skip my meal. Knowing the situation you can understand that she was sacrificing a lot because she loved me and wanted to make sure I didn't fall ill. I think this is how the Pharisees of Jesus time were and how the Rabbis are today. They loved G-d a lot and would not leave anything undone in order to honor him. There will always be bad Pharisees and Rabbis in any generation, but I question the way the Greek text paints *all* Rabbis, it seems antisemitic.

Answer: Not all Pharisees and rabbis are painted with the same brush in the Christian Scriptures. Joseph of Arimathea and others had positive conversations with Jesus, and he commended some scribes and Pharisees. (Mark 12:34) Many Pharisees, including Saul of Tarsus (later, the Apostle Paul), became followers of Jesus. Obviously, there were a lot of righteous Pharisees.

Historian Klausner, quotes the famous orientalist and linguist, Chwolsohn: “Jesus said and taught nothing to which the true Pharisees could not have subscribed, and did nothing with which they could find fault.” Klausner himself comments, “If Jesus complains against insincere Pharisees (Matthew 23), so also does the Talmud (R. Yehoshua ben Hanania, c. 130-150 CE., in Sota III 4)... and in the well-known Baraita

(Sota 22b and parallel passages)... and in Pesikta Rabbati (par. 22), which refers to the insincere Pharisees who cloaked themselves in praying-shawls and phylacteries only to practice deception; Jesus, too, only spoke against the more degraded and insincere, among them.”⁷¹

Good pharisees notwithstanding, percentage is the issue. Even in the Dark Ages, when the inquisition was at its height, there were some priests and monks who were appalled by it... but how many of these were there in proportion to the others? The main question regarding any period in history would be who constitutes the major force driving the character of the religion. This would be true in Judaism, Christianity, or any religion in any age.

The Talmud (Yoma 9b) says that “baseless hatred” was the reason the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE and Chabad.com adds that, “...they established their rulings on the basis of Torah law and did not go beyond the letter of the law... this too is seen as a result of baseless hatred. It is up to the litigants to be willing to find a compromise and go beyond the letter of the law, which they were unwilling to do due to their baseless hatred.”⁷² According to the Talmud, it would seem the common people, the “litigants,” were to blame for the “baseless hatred” that pervaded the nation. But blaming the soldiers for the generals’ errors won’t wash. Jesus saw the Pharisees and others as the cause of the problem and called them “blind guides,” because they were leading the nation down a wrong path. Jesus added, quite cogently, “If then, a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” (Matthew 15:14) This seems to be how things work. In my long years of experience I have come to learn that whenever there’s a bottleneck, you usually find it at the top of the bottle.

The Talmudic phrase, “[they] did not go beyond the letter of the *law*,” does not explain what is meant by “law.” The term included Rabbinic traditions that were considered binding. Jesus referred to these traditions as “heavy loads on the shoulders of men,” and said that the Pharisees made “...the word of God invalid by your tradition that you have handed down.” Their legalistic mindset meant the denigration of compassion, mercy and human kindness.⁷³

The Pharisees were scrupulous in fulfilling the minutest of religious obligations (giving “the tenth of the mint and the dill and the cumin,”) but they “disregarded the weightier matters of the Law, namely, justice and mercy and faithfulness.” (Matthew 23:23) Because they *strained out gnats and gulped down camels*, Jesus told them to learn what this means, “I want mercy, and not sacrifice.” (Compare, Matthew 9:13, with Proverbs 21:13 and Hosea 6:6.) Jesus felt no obligation to follow the Pharisaic traditions regarding the Sabbath, and this irked the Pharisees to the point that they plotted to kill him after he cured a man on the Sabbath. (Mark 3:4-6) Just think of the mindset!

The legalistic perspective of the Pharisees also affected their view of the common people who they *considered as nothing*, called them “am ha’aretz” (uncivilized, ignorant, despicable commoners), and said they were “accursed,” because they did not know the Law. (Luke 18:10; John 7:49) Jesus gave an illustration that opens a window into the mind of the Pharisees. He tells of a Pharisee and a tax collector praying at the Temple. The Pharisee thanks God that he is not dishonest and immoral “like everyone else,” including the tax collector. The tax collector would not “even raise his eyes heavenward,” as he prays, and asks God for forgiveness. Jesus concluded the illustration by saying that the tax collector “...proved more righteous than the Pharisee.”

What fascinates me about the illustration is that we should warm to the Pharisee; he is morally upright and scrupulously religious, and we should dislike the tax collector; they were a pariah on the nation. But instead we dislike the Pharisee, repugnant on a very gut level, and we sympathize with the tax collector! Jesus was illustrating how God himself feels about the proud and arrogant: “Because everyone who exalts himself will be humiliated, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14) And we can’t help but cheer that tax collector on and wish him well as he returns home.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they were condemnable. He called them out as “blind guides” and “hypocrites,” because that is what they were. The situation is comparable to today’s clergy, or the clergy of any religion in any age for that matter. Many start out with the best of motives but somewhere along the way they forget their good instincts because of erroneous religious teachings or the ease of exploiting the faithful. There will always be good and bad, as you say, but where the percentage falls matters.

As a Jew among Jews, Jesus had no reason to accuse anyone falsely. So, I go with his assessment of the situation; he was on the scene as an eyewitness and viewed the panorama in real time as it actually was. When assessing the spiritual condition of any group of believers, the buck will almost invariably stop with its leaders. As I said before, if there’s a bottleneck.....

∞ ∞ ∞

“JESUS LOST FAITH BEFORE HE DIED”

Yakov: The fact that Jesus thought he was the messiah ended in his crucifixion. He cried out, “My God why have you forsaken me?” So, he lost faith.

Answer: The gospel accounts do not end with Jesus crying out “My God my God...” After that, Jesus is given sour wine on a sponge and then he calls out, “It has been accomplished.” (Compare John 19:29, 30). This is significant in light of what Jesus said the previous night, “I tell you that what is written [in Isaiah 53:12] must be accomplished in me, namely, ‘He was counted with lawless ones.’ For this is being fulfilled concerning me.” (Luke 22:37) Here, at the end of the last full day of his life, he has in mind that he had fulfilled Isaiah 53 to the bitter end. His physical and emotional suffering did not minimize his personal conviction that he was the foretold Messiah.

The account continues after Jesus’ death with his resurrection on the third day. First, he appears to some female disciples, then to Peter, then to the rest of the disciples as well as to 500 at the same time in Galilee. Finally, Acts recounts Jesus’ appearance to Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul. (Compare: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Matthew 28:7; Luke 24:46; Luke 24:34; John 20:26; Matthew 28:16, 17; Acts 9:3-5.) These passages represent historical accounts, some written by eyewitnesses and others written while eyewitnesses were alive and available to speak about what they had witnessed.

It is inconsistent to accept Jesus’ words, “My God my God...,” as historical and then reject, or ignore, what comes after those words as if it were not part of the same historical account. And, if “My God my God...,” is accepted as historical, why question Jesus’ resurrection? It’s all part of the same account.

∞ ∞ ∞

“JUST BECAUSE JESUS BELIEVED HE WAS THE MESSIAH DOESN'T MEAN HE WAS”

Yakov: But Jesus' thinking he was the Messiah wouldn't make him so.

Answer: Agreed. Think of how many Napoleons there would be if that were the case. But Jesus was unique among all those that ever truly believed they were the Messiah. Certainly the results of his ministry were never duplicated. We can probably agree on that.

“My God my God why have you forsaken me,” is one of the most intriguing of Jesus' expressions. It comes out in Matthew as well as Mark and, of course, it originates in Psalm 22. Not sure why you say it indicates Jesus doubted that he was the messiah. I think it reflects his humanity and finite understanding of things rather than reflecting doubt about his messiahship.

Jesus had previously prayed, “Father if it is possible let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but yours take place.” Perhaps he did not grasp fully why he should have to die in such a humiliating way and thus bring dishonor to God's name. He knew he was going to die as a ransom sacrifice; his entire course had been leading up to that point, and he said so unambiguously. (Matthew 20:28) Perhaps he felt that he could have died in a way that wouldn't cause so much shame to his Father. Whatever the case, when he cried out “My God, my God...,” it was an exact quote from Psalm 22:1 which contains quite a few verses that Jesus' disciples saw as reflecting what he went through in those final hours.⁷⁴ There is a lot to think about in Jesus' words. At the very least it affords a glimpse into the depth of his anguish and suffering. Having endured such extreme trials without God's backing and spirit, puts paid to any doubt as to whether Jesus acted of his own free will, which is another question you raised. (Compare Isaiah 53:10.)

Looking at things from another angle, Mark and Matthew could easily have concluded that it would be better just to leave those words out... so embarrassing! Especially when Jewish opposers could latch onto them and criticize Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. That Jesus' words were even included in two gospel accounts speaks to the candor and trustworthiness of the Christian Scriptures.

∞ ∞ ∞

“‘FULFILL WHAT WAS PROPHESED' WHEN IT ISN'T A PROPHECY?”

Yakov: There are a lot of texts, like Isaiah 7:14, where the text's original context has nothing to do with Jesus, but they still say, “and this happened to fulfill what was prophesied...” Take Isaiah 6:9, 10 for example.

Answer: In Matthew 13:14, Jesus said, “And the prophecy of Isaiah [6:9, 10] is being fulfilled in their case. It says: ‘You will indeed hear but by no means get the sense of it, and you will indeed look but by no means see.’” Since God was telling Isaiah what to say to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in his own day, the term “prophecy,” may not seem to fit regarding Jesus' day, but it does.

Prophecy is not necessarily a reference to a future event. *Insight on the Scriptures* says the following in the article *Prophecy*: “An inspired message; a revelation of divine will and purpose or the proclamation thereof. Prophecy may be an inspired moral teaching,

an expression of a divine command or judgment, or a declaration of something to come. Prediction, or foretelling, is not the basic thought conveyed by the root verbs in the original languages (Heb., na·va"; Gr., pro·phe·teu'o); yet it forms an outstanding feature of Bible prophecy."

As we can see, even though most people automatically associate "prophecy" with foretelling the future, that is not the basic idea of the word. Isaiah was *prophesying*, uttering "a proclamation... an inspired moral teaching," when he was telling the Jews: to leave their idols, care for widows and orphans, and be honest. The point being, that just as people did not pay attention to Isaiah when he *prophesied*, that is, spoke about Gods "divine will and purpose," so they did not pay attention to Jesus when he *prophesied* in a similar vein.

Yakov: You are right. The word Nevi'im has 4 meanings, and the best meaning is one who speaks on behalf of G-d. I think Abraham was called a prophet the first time in the event of Abimelech & Aaron the second to be called that. Neither foretold the future, but only spoke on behalf of G-d. Same applies to Isaiah, Jeremiah and the rest. They spoke about the current [state, issues, correction needed] and if this issue is not addressed something bad will happen.

NOTE: So there were some bright spots in our conversations!

∞ ∞ ∞

"VICARIOUS SACRIFICE DOES NOT EXIST IN THE TANAKH"

This has already been discussed but because it is such a common objection it is worth repeating here for the reader's benefit; easier to locate.

Yakov: Vicarious atonement is not taught in Tanakh. At best we have an animal take the place of the sinner for unintentional sins. In my reasoning, this just tells the person that you lost a valuable animal now be careful and do not make the same mistake again.

Answer: Every sacrifice under the Law for guilt or sin etc, was vicarious. All sacrifices were substitute or surrogate sacrifices. Either the animal died to mitigate the guilt of the individual presenting the sacrifice or there was some sort of compensation. In Isaiah 53, the Servant is said to *bear the punishment* of others, and his death as a "guilt offering," is the very *definition* of a vicarious, substitutionary, surrogate sacrifice. (Isaiah 53:5, 8, 10, 12.) Even if the Servant is interpreted as collective Israel, the sacrifice is still vicarious by definition, Israel would be suffering in place of the nations.

- **Definition:** "*Vicarious* comes from the Latin word *vicarius*, which means 'substitute.' As an adjective: suffered or done by one person as a substitute for another... '*vicarious atonement*.'"

∞ ∞ ∞

"THERE IS NO SACRIFICE FOR INTENTIONAL SIN IN THE LAW"

Yakov: "Christians say that Jesus' death on the cross is an atonement for all sin for those who believe, but in the Torah, blood atonement was only for unintentional sin."

Answer: Well, that is progress! At least you agree that Jesus' sacrifice can cover *unintentional* sins, which covers the majority of mankind who don't know the Law (excluding, of course, the Jews who should know the Law).

The Law made a distinction between those who sinned due to fleshly weakness, and those who purposely broke the Law. Whether Jesus' sacrifice will cover the sins of the intentional wrongdoer is up to God. A few things need to be clarified in order to fully grasp the issue.

First, what is sin? Sin, ["חטא"] "chet," literally means, "missing the mark."⁷⁵

- **Judges 20:16**, "[Benjaminite warriors] could sling a stone at a hair and *not miss*."
 - "Not miss," [חטא־ל], "lo yachati," (from, chet), means "not *miss* the target."

The "sin offering," [חטאת] "chatat" (a word related to sin, chet), was used in purification of those with certain illnesses or cleansing a house from strange mold etc. The cleansing ceremony for those with leprosy involved animal sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood. (Leviticus 14:3-19) Disease, therefore, is *sin*, in the strictest sense of the word; it is *missing the mark* of perfect health. Imperfection is "sin," and since no one is perfect, "there is no man who does not sin." (1 Kings 8:46) Sin is something that affected everyone, and purification was required under the Law for everyone at certain times in their life. No one escaped.

- **Psalms 51:5, 7** "Behold, with iniquity I was formed, and *with sin my mother conceived me*... Purify me with a hyssop, and I will become pure; wash me, and I will become whiter than snow."

The allegation that Jesus' sacrifice could not cover *intentional* sins, misses the point; human imperfection is the issue, not intentionality. All humanity is under the burden of imperfection, and this must be atoned for in some fashion. Sacrifices under the Law were good until the next illness or difficulty and then some sort of atonement process had to be repeated. That worked for the Jews, but not so much for the gentiles since they were on their own. But it doesn't work for anyone today because there are no acceptable sacrifices being offered in Jerusalem. Jesus' sacrifice was offered once for all time, is accessible to Jew and Gentile alike, and covers every sort of sin including basic human imperfection.

- **Hebrews 10:1, 14** "...since the Law has a shadow of the good things to come, but not the very substance of the things, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make those who approach perfect... 14 For it is by one sacrificial offering that he has made those who are being sanctified perfect for all time."

Your objection takes it as axiomatic that God is bound by the Mosaic Law regarding who he can forgive. This is the most important part of the objection because it goes to the heart of how we should understand God's sovereignty. Talmudic comments may cause some to conclude that, yes, God is bound by Torah.

- Avodah Zara 3b (Babylonian Talmud), "There are twelve hours in the day. During the first three, the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and engages in Torah study."

NOTE: *Torah*, in this context, includes the Rabbinic discussions in the Talmud (Gittin 6b). Such comments in the Talmud may have been merely a way of emphasizing the

importance of the Torah, but I know for a fact many religious Jews seriously believe that God studies *Torah* every day.⁷⁶

God is obviously not bound by the Law that he gave to Israel, and to suppose otherwise is absurd on its face. The *right of pardon* is an integral part of God's sovereignty, it's part of his job description, it is included in the word *Almighty*!

- **Exodus 33:19** "I will favor the one whom I favor, and I will show mercy to the one to whom I show mercy."

God said the above in response to Moses' request to see his "glory." In other words, the right of pardon is a basic component of God's "glory." God is autonomous. God does what he wants!

- **Psalms 115:3** "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever he pleases."
- **Isaiah 46:10** "I say, 'My decision will stand, and *I will do whatever I please*.'"
 - To insinuate that before God pardons someone he needs to consider what is written in the Law that he himself gave to the Israelites, reveals a fundamental lack of understanding of God's nature, who he is, his Almightyness. Governors and presidents of every nation have the right of pardon. If God wants to pardon someone, he does it.
- **2 Samuel 12:13, 14** "David then said to Nathan: 'I have sinned against Jehovah.' Nathan replied to David: 'Jehovah, in turn, forgives your sin. You will not die.'"
 - If God were bound by the Mosaic Law, he would not have been able to pardon King David even though he *wanted* to because willful manslaughter and adultery were unpardonable under the Law. But God did pardon David, and he did it because he wanted to. He is God and he *shows mercy to the one he wants to*.⁷⁷

The angle in your objection that bears looking at, is how the Israelites may have viewed the claim that Jesus' death was a replacement for the sacrifices under the Mosaic Law.

Israelites would have been familiar with the many sacrifices demanding repentance and sacrifice for intentional offenses and even compensation, this was second nature for them. They would not have focused myopically on the "sin offering."

- **Exodus 22:7-9** "If a man gives his fellow man money or articles to keep and these are stolen from the fellow man's house, if the thief is found, he must make double compensation... 9 In all cases of illegal possession of goods, concerning a bull, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or anything lost of which he may say, 'This is mine!' both parties will present their case before the true God. The one whom God pronounces guilty is to make double compensation to his fellow man."
- **Leviticus 5:1-3** "If someone sins because he has heard a public call to testify and he is a witness or has seen or learned about it and he does not report it, then he will answer for his error.⁷⁸ 2 Or when a person touches anything unclean, whether the dead body of an unclean wild animal, an unclean domestic animal, or an unclean swarming creature, he is unclean and has become guilty even if he does not realize it..."
- **Lev 6:2-7** "If someone sins and behaves unfaithfully toward Jehovah by *deceiving his neighbor* in connection with something entrusted to him, or something deposited with him, or he robs or *defrauds his neighbor*, 3 or he finds something lost and is *deceptive* about it, and if he *swears falsely* over any such sin he may commit, this is what he should do: 4 If he has sinned and is guilty, he must return what he stole, what he extorted, what he took by fraud, what was

entrusted to him, or the lost thing that he found, 5 or anything about which he swore falsely, and *he must make full compensation* for it, *and he will add to it a fifth of its value*. He will give it to the owner on the day his guilt is proved. 6 And he will bring to the priest as his guilt offering to Jehovah a sound ram from the flock according to the assessed value, for a *guilt offering*. 7 *The priest will make atonement for him before Jehovah, and he will be forgiven* for anything he may have done resulting in his guilt.”

- **Numbers 5:6-8** “Tell the Israelites, ‘If a man or a woman commits *any of the sins of mankind* and acts unfaithfully toward Jehovah, that person has become guilty. 7 He must confess the sin that he has committed and return the full amount as compensation for his guilt and also add a fifth of its value; he is to give it to the one he wronged. If the wronged person had died, the nearest male relative got the compensation; if there was no near relative, the priest received it. 8 But if the victim does not have a close relative to receive the compensation, it should be returned to Jehovah and will belong to the priest, apart from the ram of atonement with which he will make atonement for him.’”

The above passages describe sacrifices for both intentional and unintentional sins. To allege that there was no sacrifice for intentional sins displays a lack of understanding the system of sacrifices under the Law. And, to imply that the Law Almighty God formulated and gave to the Israelites would restrict his right of pardon, shows that the one making the allegation has not grasped the meaning of the word *Almighty*.

Yakov: I agree the guilt offering was mandatory, but it was for a specific set of transgressions/sins committed against a fellow Jew. I have never committed any of the 5 sins that are listed for the guilt offering so Jesus's death, blood and his guilt offering does not help me get right with god.

Answer: You are a good man, Yakov! However, the term “*any of the sins of mankind*,” in Numbers 5:6 above, is as inclusive as it gets, all mankind is in the picture, including you (and me).

The Servant's death is called a *guilt offering (asham)* in Isaiah 53:10. The Servant's soul/life is viewed as compensatory, corresponding, or covering for the sins of those accepting it, and it makes possible a good standing before God. All Israelites could easily relate to and understand the concept. In fact thousands did, including many priests who knew the Law in detail and were accustomed to handling the sacrifices for those seeking to atone for one transgression or another. In Psalm 51:7, David mentioned being *purified from his sin with the hyssop plant*. This was part of the purification rite under the Law and meant being sprinkled with blood, it was everyday parlance among Jews and was used as a point of reference in explaining Jesus' sacrifice.

- **Hebrew 9:13, 14** “For if the blood of goats and of bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled [by hyssop] on those who have been defiled sanctifies for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of the Christ... cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we may render sacred service to the living God?”

Yakov: You will face one more challenge aside from the fact that Christians think/claim that Jesus was their sin sacrifice not a guilt sacrifice and that the guilt sacrifice was only 5 specific sins, if a person is poor, he can bring flour as a guilt offering. No blood is needed.

Answer: Only “one more challenge”... sounds like I did okay on the others! You are right, the poor could offer flour for the guilt offering. (Leviticus 5:11-13) But the objection ignores other sacrifices under the Law. For example, the sacrifice for sin on the Day of Atonement was a blood sacrifice designed to cover everything for everyone, intentional or unintentional.

- **Leviticus 16:34** This will serve as a lasting statute for you, to make atonement for the Israelites concerning all their sins once each year [on the Day of Atonement].”

Jesus’ sacrifice replaced the full gamut of sacrifices under the Law; both blood and bloodless sacrifices, for intentional and unintentional sins, and it also covered human imperfection.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

“CHRISTIANS TAMPERED WITH THE SEPTUAGINT TO FAVOR TO FAVOR THEIR DOCTRINES”

Those who penned the Christian Scriptures mainly used the Greek *Septuagint* when quoting the Hebrew Tanakh. And so, some differences exist in the wording of quotations. For example, Isaiah 7:14 reads in Hebrew, “the young woman is with child,” while the Septuagint reads, “the virgin will/shall be with child.”

Jewish outreach websites accuse Christians of tampering with the text of the *Septuagint* to fit their doctrine. Few realize however, that the rabbis were the ones who tampered with the Greek text. The Talmud speaks of this openly in Megillah 9a/b where it mentions 14 passages that were purposely mistranslated and the reasons for mistranslating them.⁷⁹ So, while there is proof that Christians did *not* manipulate the early text of the Septuagint, as discussed below, it is a fact that the rabbis did.

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov: You cite the Septuagint as a source for translating, “a virgin *shall* conceive” in Isaiah 7:14, but Christians tampered with the Septuagint after the first five books were translated from Hebrew to Greek, so it would line up with Christian ideas.

Answer: If Christians tampered with the Septuagint to suit their beliefs, it calls into question the veracity of the Christian Scriptures. So, the accusation is serious and has far reaching implications.

The five books of Moses were the first to be translated from Hebrew to Greek (probably finished around 280 BCE), and the rest of the Tanakh was translated and in full circulation by 150 BCE. Two things are indisputable: First, The remaining books of the Septuagint that Christians used in the 1st Century, were translated by Jews long before Jesus or his disciples were on the scene. Second, falsified quotations would have been spotted immediately because the Septuagint was so widely used.

- **Britannica:** “Analysis of the language has established that the Torah, or Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), was translated near the middle of the 3rd century BCE, and that the rest of the Old Testament was translated in the 2nd century BCE.”

Yakov: But the first 5 books were translated by rabbis and the rest wasn't translated by rabbis.

Answer: I don't know of any reliable source that backs you up on what you are saying. What is your source.

Yakov: You can look it up.

Answer: Where?

Yakov: Look for it, you'll find it.

Answer: Anyway... Emmanuel Tov, professor emeritus at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and one of the leading authorities on the Septuagint, says that some things are clear regarding the *Septuagint* (though questions remain about who the translators of the *Septuagint* were and where it was translated):⁸⁰

- The post-Pentateuchal books were probably translated in Palestine.
- The Jewishness of the *Septuagint* is not in doubt.
- The *Septuagint* translation became hallowed Scripture within Judaism.

But I would still appreciate receiving a source for your comment that the translators of the post-Pentateuchal books of the *Septuagint* were not rabbis, I haven't found one.

Yakov: So who is Emmanuel Tov, just another guy giving his opinion on the Septuagint. I just stick with the Masoretic text.

NOTE: By this time, I should have seen that last one coming. Anyway, I'm guessing that Yakov didn't want to provide the source because it probably came from a YouTube rabbi he admires, and he was embarrassed to tell me.⁸¹ The rabbi gives no basis for his statement because there is none. These guys just say stuff.

∞ ∞ ∞

“REFERENCES TO ISAIAH 52/53 WERE ADDED TO THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES MUCH LATER”

Yakov doubted the authenticity of Servant references in the Christian Scriptures. This accusation came up in Roth's article and is common in Jewish outreach sources.

ANSWER: The accusation begs the question whether the Christian Scriptures are historical documents, or just a collection of events and speeches that were embellished until they finally became a document that supported Christian claims. Just as a side note, the accusation is tacit admission that the Christian Scriptures do support the Christian belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah, something anti-missionary groups question.

For those with an apriori rejection of the Christian Scriptures, an answer is irrelevant because their opinion is already set in stone. But adopting that position is a two-edged sword since the same allegations levied against the historicity of the Christian Scriptures are also levied against the Tanakh: Did Moses really exist? Did he part the Red Sea? Did David kill Goliath? And so on.

Here are some facts that a skeptic might consider:

Since the Servant passage in Isaiah 52/53 was originally understood to be a prophecy about an individual, there is no reason to doubt that Israelites in the 1st Century, including the first Christians (all of whom were Jews), knew the passage well and viewed it as referring to an individual, even the Messiah.

The Christian Scriptures have the ring of authenticity throughout: In *Is Jesus an Historical Personality?*, former head Rabbi of Sweden, G. Klein, wrote, “[In the Gospels] a Jew is speaking, no cult hero but a Jew with a marked national consciousness... The background is definitely Jewish. The odor of the Palestinian earth which streams up from these pages is so strong that only unbridled fantasy could transform this historical Jesus into a myth... Here is a fact which rests on so firm a foundation that no philosophy can shake it: Jesus of Nazareth is a historical personality.”⁸²

Rabbi Samuel Sandmel, former Provost and Professor of Bible and Hellenistic Literature at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, wrote the following in *Jewish understanding of the New Testament*, “Jesus, who emerged into public notice in Galilee when Herod Antipas was its Tetrarch, was a real person, the leader of a movement. He had followers, called disciples. The claim was made, either by him or for him, that he was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. He journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem, possibly in 29 or 30, and there he was executed, crucified by the Romans as a political rebel.”⁸³

Rabbi and Theologian Leo Baeck, a Holocaust survivor and founder of the Leo Baeck Institute, wrote in *The Gospel as a Document of Jewish Religious History*, “The gospel is a Jewish book... purely and simply because, the clear air which blows through it and which it breathes is the air of Holy Scripture.”⁸⁴

When Albert Einstein was asked if he believed that Jesus was an historical figure, he replied, “Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word.”⁸⁵

Looking at the Christian Scriptures strictly as an historic document we see the following: Jesus quoted from Isaiah 53 and applied it to himself and, less than two months later, Peter referred to Isaiah 53 in a speech to a crowd gathered in Jerusalem. His reasoning convinced some 3000 individuals to accept that Jesus was the Servant and Messiah. Peter gave a similar speech shortly after that and 2000 more, including “a great crowd of priests,” accepted that Jesus was the foretold Servant in Isaiah 52/53.

Especially interesting is the use of one-word allusions to the Servant passage because these are easily passed over. The idea that some overzealous soul would slip in oblique references to Jesus is less comprehensible than the allegation that whole *quotations* were stuck in here and there. Someone seeking to buttress a weak doctrine would want to get more bang for their buck than just an obscure reference hardly noticed by anyone... it would be subtly overdone

The information below is divided into four parts: 1) Quotations, 2) References to the *Servant*, 3) Peter’s speech at the Festival of Shavuot/Pentecost, and 4) References to Jesus’ “*exaltation/glorification*.” (Referring to Isaiah 52:13.)⁸⁶

1. Quotations

Mathew 12:18-20 “Look! My servant whom I chose, my beloved, whom I have approved! I will put my spirit upon him, and what justice is he will make clear to the nations. 19 He will not quarrel nor cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the main streets. 20 No bruised reed will he crush, and no smoldering wick will he extinguish, until he brings justice with success.”

- This Servant reference includes Isaiah 52/53, as well as Isaiah 42:1-3.

Luke 22:37 [Jesus said] “For I tell you that what is written [in Isaiah 53:12] must be accomplished in me, namely, ‘He was counted with lawless ones.’ For this is being fulfilled concerning me.”

Ac 8:30-35 30 “Philip... said [to the Ethiopian]: ‘Do you actually know what you are reading?’ 31 He said: ‘Really, how could I ever do so unless someone guided me?’ So he urged Philip to get on and sit down with him. 32 Now this was the passage of Scripture that he was reading [Isaiah 53:7, 8]: ‘Like a sheep he was brought to the slaughter, and like a lamb that is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. 33 During his humiliation, justice was taken away from him. Who will tell the details of his generation? Because his life is taken away from the earth.’ 34 The eunuch then said to Philip: ‘I beg you, about whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about some other man?’ 35 Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he declared to him the good news about Jesus.”

2. References to the Servant in Isaiah 52/53

Acts 3:13, 18 “The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our forefathers, has glorified his Servant [Isaiah 52:13; 53:11], Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned before Pilate, even though he had decided to release him... 18 But in this way God has fulfilled the things he announced beforehand [in Isaiah 53:8] through the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer.”

Acts 4:27 “For truly both Herod and Pontius Pilate with men of the nations and with peoples of Israel were gathered together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.”—Isaiah 52:13; 53:11.

Acts 4:30 “...while you stretch out your hand for healing and while signs and wonders occur through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”—Isaiah 52:13; 53:11.

3. Peter’s speech and its effect on thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem

Acts 2:33-41 “Therefore, because he was exalted to the right hand of God [Isaiah 52:13]... let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that *God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you executed* on a stake. 37 Now when they heard this, they were stabbed to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: ‘Men, brothers, what should we do?’ 38 Peter said to them: ‘Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of your sins,’... 41 So *those who gladly accepted his word were baptized*, and on that day *about 3,000 people* were added.”

4. References to Jesus’ being exalted/glorified (Isaiah 52:13)

John 7:39 “However, he said this concerning the spirit, which those who put faith in him were about to receive; for as yet there was no spirit, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

John 12:16 “These things his disciples did not understand at first, but when Jesus was glorified, they recalled that these things were written about him and that they did these things to him.”

John 12:23 “But Jesus answered them: ‘The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.’”

Acts 2:33. “Therefore, because he was exalted to the right hand of God and received the promised holy spirit from the Father, he has poured out what you see and hear.”

Acts 3:13 “The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our forefathers, has glorified his Servant, Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned before Pilate, even though he had decided to release him.”

Acts 5:31 “God exalted this one as Chief Agent and Savior to his right hand, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

Philippians 2:9 “For this very reason, God exalted him to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name...”

Hebrews 7:26 “For it is fitting for us to have such a high priest who is loyal, innocent, undefiled, separated from the sinners, and exalted above the heavens.”

Luke 9:22-36 is also pertinent to the above list. In this passage, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a high mountain and while there, he is “transfigured,” his appearance changes, his face and clothing shine brightly, and he is seen conversing with Moses and Elijah. (Compare Matthew 17:1-9.)

The transfiguration event is reminiscent of the Servant’s exaltation described in Isaiah 52:13 and 53:10-12, “My servant will be raised up high, he will be elevated and greatly exalted.”⁸⁷ Jesus’ words in Luke 9:22, “The son of man must undergo many sufferings... and be killed, and on the third day be raised up,” said in the same context as the transfiguration event, also link it to Isaiah 53, since 53:5, 8 and 10-12, mention the Servant’s trials and that he would “prolong his days” after being “cut off from the land of the living.”

The Apostle Peter writes, “[The spirit] testified beforehand about the *sufferings* [in 53:5, 8] meant for Christ and about the *glory* [in 52:13 and 53:10-12] that would follow.” (1 Peter 1:11) This is the same reference to the Servant’s trials that Jesus mentioned shortly before the transfiguration experience. Peter references that experience directly and says that it makes *the prophetic word [Isaiah 52/53] more sure*.—2 Peter 1:17-18.

In the final analysis, the allegation that references to Isaiah 52/53 were added after the fact, says more about the one raising the question than it does about the Christian Scriptures.

∞ ∞ ∞

“STATISTICALLY, EVEN YOU COULD BE MESSIAH”

NOTE: The following is repeated from *An Introduction To the Discussion of Messianic Passages*, Chapter 2, to facilitate reference accessibility.

Yakov: My view is, if a prophecy that can apply to millions of people and you take 100s of such prophecies and call it “not coincidence,” this is not a safe bet, I feel. I actually proved to one Jehovah Witness person that 50% of these generic claims happened to him. BTW, 85% of mouse DNA is the same as human DNA and 63% of spider DNA is the same as human DNA.

Answer: Yakov, you understate the case since statistics can be notoriously deceptive. Your 50% statistic falls way short of anything that might be considered a possibility. There were a lot of requisites the Messiah had to fill. Just to name a few...

- A male Jew, which disqualified the vast majority of the human race at that time.
- From the tribe of Judah. Another disqualifier.
- A descendant of King David. The same.
- Born in the 1st Century before the destruction of the Second Temple. Humanity before and after is out of court.
- Born in the town of Bethlehem. Small town, with few inhabitants.
- A wonderful teacher.
- Peaceful, not a military messiah.
- Wrongly condemned. That cuts the possibilities way down.
- Executed with condemned criminals.
- They cast lots over his garments. How many was that done to?
- Buried with the rich.
- He would become, “[a] signal for the peoples... To him the nations will turn for guidance.”—Isaiah 11:10.
- And a list of etcetera’s...

You see, it’s not a matter of 99.9% and you’re good. It’s *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*; miss one miniscule point and it’s game over. For example, 98.8% of chimp DNA is the same as human DNA. But thank God for that 1.2% difference! Otherwise we would all be living in trees instead of houses. As the saying goes: “Close only counts in horseshoes.”

∞ ∞ ∞

– YAKOV AND ME – EPILOGUE

So, you may wonder how things finally turned out with Yakov. On the other hand, you may have guessed. It probably won’t surprise you that he did not embrace Christianity, but did he change some of his ideas and at least drop some of his objections? The short answer is, not really.

We felt it was important to try, at very least, to get agreement regarding hard “facts,” if nothing else. But getting him to admit to even a basic *fact* was an uphill battle. Getting agreement on a reasonable assumption... well, forget it. Through it all, Yakov’s concessions, which were few and far between, were given grudgingly, mostly partial and only after repeated requests.

After sending Yakov the analysis of Isaiah 52/53, answering each of his questions, Yakov’s line went dead, no response to either Ronnie or me... ghosted. After a month and a half, I decided to write. Here is my final email to Yakov followed by his answer. Both emails are edited due to length and to save the reader the slings and arrows of Yakov’s harsher comments.

The Final Email to Yakov (5/22/24)

Hi Yakov,

I hope you are doing well. It's been well over a month since our last communication, and I was wondering if you had taken the time to read the doc on Isaiah 52/53 where I answer over 50 of your questions. I would be interested in your take, especially regarding the accusations of Christian manipulation of the Hebrew text.

I will take the time to clarify some things you said in your last Tanakh Talk [WhatsApp] message. I would have done so sooner but was hoping to hear from you first regarding the Isaiah doc. But I'll go ahead and comment on some of your statements at this time.

I believe it has been shown beyond doubt or refutation that Christian translations of Isaiah 52/53 have not been manipulated. It is hard to sustain that accusation when, in *every* single case there are Jewish translations that say the same as the Christian ones. It was also shown that Chabad and Artscroll have manipulated their translations. If you take the time to read the Isaiah 52/53 doc, if you haven't already, you will see that is the case.

I am saddened that our contact ended on such a sour note and am curious to know why. Ending the contact is ok, if we were not able to see eye to eye, then fine. But why so much resentment?

I would pinpoint the Roth article as the turning point in the relationship. You seemed very upset at seeing Roth taken apart and shown to be a tainted source. You even accused me of blindsiding you by going over the article. I had to show you the string of emails and the fact that I had cleared it with you first. You had given your consent, we had agreed, you said it was a good idea. But after that conversation you seemed changed.

Then you chafed at my pointing out that you had treated Ronnie unkindly, chided me for not giving an in-depth explanation and accused me of implying you were stupid, something I do not believe and have never implied. The explanation I gave regarding your treatment of Ronnie may have offended you more than just pointing out that you had been unkind.

Many of your comments showed obvious irritation... I look at these expressions and think, why is this guy so angry? Was it taking Roth's article apart? Was it.....? I would appreciate an explanation, and you have my permission to say what you like, don't pull any punches... I'm listening.

In closing, I want you to know that through all these months Ronnie and I have always been sincere, upfront, and honest. I have spent more hours than you could possibly imagine reading your articles and working up answers to your questions and objections (and that while... [being a caregiver]). Why? Out of appreciation for your devotion and love for God and his Word, and because Ronnie had spoken so highly of you.

We had a deal [about topics we would cover], and we kept our part of the bargain. You backed out when we were halfway through Isaiah 7:14 and now with the Isaiah 52/53 doc. Ronnie and I have fulfilled our part of the bargain by giving you answers to your

questions and objections. Accepting or rejecting them is your prerogative, but we have done what we said we would do.

Wishing you the best and hoping to hear from you,

Lon

∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov's Reply (5/22/24)

Yes Lon. I read through your emails. I did not see it worth my time to respond to your responses... I concluded you are a gentile like the 2.5 billion ignorant Christians who worship a dead Jew as god.

You can continue to believe Jesus died for your sins and all the other pagan ideas that the Greek text teaches. I am not keen to invest any more time on you.

Peace and be well.

[unsigned]

[At least he wished me peace and wellness!]

∞ ∞ ∞

(NOTE: Yakov says what he does despite knowing that Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Jesus is God.)

∞ ∞ ∞

Though I was a missionary for over three decades, my secular profession is conflict management which means I am accustomed to mending relationships and unaccustomed to seeing that one of my own goes South, and no more so than in the field of religious dialogue. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, I probably dedicate more time than most trying to understand why things went wrong.

So I'm left wondering what happened to this guy? Why has someone who was *sort of* amiable become so filled with resentment. Since there were no concrete answers in his final communication, I'm left looking into the void and piecing things together as best I can. My opinion in this respect is not the product of a whim, I have seven months of experience with Yakov under my belt. Of course, my assessment may be wrong, but the reader is in a position to judge having read what Yakov has written and how I have answered. What I say now is without any reference to Yakov's basic nature and intelligence. I've already said I believe he is intelligent, basically a sincere and good person, and I hold to that opinion.

Yakov seems seriously hindered by confirmation bias, meaning he gravitates toward conclusions that fit his preconceptions. Of course, we all do to some extent, but when that becomes the default setting, it does a number on our critical thinking ability.

Julia Galef, referenced earlier, pointed out that intelligence on its own does not facilitate an objective grasp of the world and the many different issues that confront us. In *The Scout Mindset: Why Some People See Things Clearly and Others Don't*, she elucidates more on the subject, "The soldier mindset is like being a soldier on a battlefield, trying to

defend the fortress of one's beliefs against any evidence to the contrary. The scout mindset is to go out and see what's really there. The scout is basically trying to be intellectually honest, and objective, and curious about what's actually true."

Yakov is a soldier. In true "soldier" fashion, he chooses a single source of information, Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), to the exclusion of others. As he commented in a WhatsApp chat, "Regarding who I would trust between an Orthodox Rabbi verses any other, Jewish, Sect/Gentile, I will always go with the Orthodox Rabbi." Because of this unqualified trust, he does not thoroughly vet ideas (neither the sources he consults nor his own), and this trammels his ability to reach healthy conclusions. And since untested conclusions multiply exponentially the opportunities for embarrassment, this is a recipe for disaster... and is especially hard on someone who dislikes being mistaken. Nobody likes being caught out in a mistake, but some feel the sting much more than others... and resent it more.

Those are the major pieces of the puzzle; buying exclusively into tainted sources, untested conclusions, some pride, and there you have a snapshot of the individual... as well as a predictable breakdown in communication when a credible challenge to his ideas arises and threatens his worldview. The soldier retreats in anger.

Yakov disliked it when we requested that he own up to proven facts, but it was the discussion on the Roth article that marked the first notable downturn in our relationship. He was caught flat footed; his sources were shown to be tainted, and his champion dishonest. His pride was wounded, he became visibly upset and, from that point on, the dialogue was less amiable. The final nail in the coffin came when I pointed out that he was attacking Ronnie (on WhatsApp) without provocation or motive. I wrote that he seemed a little edgy and ready to turn any statement into a conflict, and added, "Angry about something?" He replied that I lacked the decency to explain where he was wrong, so, in a private email, I explained where I felt he was in error. His reply came in the final email above, laden with invectives. And so ended the saga of *Yakov and Me*, somewhat ingloriously.

Though Yakov's last few interactions were clearly not his finest, no one should be defined by their most unflattering moments. Toward the beginning of our conversations, he wrote, "I will not challenge you if you say you believe something even if Tanakh does not say it... I will not challenge any claim you have that is based on the [Christian] Greek Text." It may be, then, that his conduct toward the end violated deeply held personal convictions, as well as his own self-image. If so, he likely spent some days and nights digesting what went down and justifying his conduct to himself. Whether Yakov's final interactions mark an irrevocable change in character will likely depend on the degree to which he buys into the justification for his conduct.

Someone might ask: Why invest so much time and effort in a person who displays that sort of attitude? A reasonable question, the same one my wife asked me a dozen times. There are several reasons. For one, Ronnie had many good things to say about him. Also, Yakov had requested that we go over certain topics together and we gave our word that we would see it through to the end. Finally, focusing on Yakov's reticence to accept reasonable answers does not give the full picture of the man. There were moments where he was very congenial and, at times, even apologetic. Our first meeting seemed full of promise for productive interchange and sometimes his replies were insightful, like his answer, "You are right [about Isaiah 6:10]," followed by reasons why.

(See *Fulfill What Was Prophesied When It Isn't a Prophecy?*, Chapter 3.) Along with that, there was this brief exchange revealing the laudable side of his nature.

- **Me:** Could it be that you are too focused on finding faults?
- **Yakov:** I think you are right. Subconsciously I seem to enjoy finding faults in the Greek text. I am sorry if I came on like a jerk. I thought I was always kind to Christians, but I guess I can do better. I will be careful with the words and tone I choose when I criticize the Greek Text.

Would that all of our exchanges had reflected that depth of honest introspection and humility!

I generally reserve the heavy lifting for those who are more reasonable, and with Yakov I would have bowed out after a couple of months, when he discontinued the conversation halfway through the discussion of Isaiah 7:14. But seeing how he reveled in stories of people who could not answer his questions, including pastors and priests, we wanted to at least try to show him that the Christian Scriptures provide solid answers to the objections he was presenting. We had 1 Peter 3:15 in mind, “always ready to make a defense before everyone who demands of you a reason for the hope you have, but doing so with a mild temper and deep respect.” Yakov had demanded *reasons for our hope*, and we felt obligated to provide them. This we accomplished, and regardless of Yakov’s rejection of what was said, the time and effort was not wasted.

When Samson found that bees had made a hive in the carcass of a lion he had killed, he used the incident as the basis for a riddle he told the Philistines: “...out of the strong came something sweet (“mei az yatsa matok” – מֵעַז יָצָא מַתּוֹק).” (Judges 14:14) That is a common expression in Israel today, sort of like, “the best things happen for the worst reasons.” So, like Samson’s riddle, the experience with Yakov may not have been the most pleasurable – it was “strong” – but at least something “matok,” a book, has come out of it. And I hope it may prove valuable as an aid to all those who are sincerely looking for answers to difficult questions posed by Jewish sources.

In short, it was an experience I would not have missed for the world (though I wouldn’t give you a nickel for another just like it).

∞ ∞ ∞

I would not want to end as if the interaction with Yakov is what should be remembered, it is not. The experience we shared over seven months, intense, at times difficult, never dull, is not the big picture. It is a mere ripple in the ocean of human experience.

As inconsequential as the experience may be against the backdrop of human history, it does form part of something that is truly significant; the appearance of Jesus on the earthly stage, the claim of his messiahship, his remarkable life, his death, and resurrection. Jesus said, “I came to start a fire on the earth, and what more is there for me to wish if it has already been lit?” (Luke 12:49) No one can deny the veracity of those words. The “fire” he started is the campaign he initiated nearly 2000 years ago which unavoidably includes conversation and controversy.

If we had a God’s-eye-view of history, we would see that Yakov, Ronnie and I were acting out a scene that has been repeated tens of thousands of times over the last 2000 years. The Israelites and Pharisees argued amongst themselves as to who Jesus was (John 9:16, 17), the Pharisees and Sadducees disputed with Jesus (Mark 8:11; 12:18,

28), Stephen disputed with the Synagogue of the Freedmen (which got him killed, Acts 9:29), and the Apostle Paul with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. (Acts 17:18) And then there are later accounts of amiable religious controversies like the mid-2nd Century account written by Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (perhaps Rabbi Tarfon of Talmudic fame), and Origen's account (early/mid-3rd Century) of a conversation with "learned" Jews on Isaiah 53. (By the 5th Century, however, things took a dark turn.⁸⁸) And so, conversation and controversy will inevitably continue until Jesus returns as King of God's Kingdom to initiate the Messianic Age and bring peace to the earth.

∞ ∞ ∞

— ADDENDUMS —

1. 1800 YEARS OF JEWISH INTERPRETATION IDENTIFYING THE SERVANT AS AN INDIVIDUAL

I mentioned to Yakov that the majority Jewish opinion viewed the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 as an individual for 18 centuries. I didn't provide a source for the statement because the information is well known and accessible. But Yakov had never heard of it and requested, rightfully, that I supply the source for my statement.

I chose Wikipedia, though there are many other sources available. In the Wikipedia article, *Isaiah 53*, under the subheading *National*, we read the following: "This interpretation states that the servant is a metaphor for the entire nation of Israel. The sufferings of the servant are seen as sufferings of the nation as a whole while in exile. Origen (a 3rd Century Christian) mentions he debated with some unnamed Jews who presented the argument that the Servant is collective Israel. This interpretation is not explicitly mentioned in Rabbinic sources until the Middle Ages when it became the majority position within Judaism. Sometimes this view is combined with the 'righteous remnant' view (see Rashi's commentary on Isaiah 53:3 and 53:8)."

Wikipedia lists various rabbinic views of the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 (some Talmudic and some not).⁸⁹

As a specific individual:

- Rabbi Akiva (Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 5:1)
- Moses (Sotah 14a)
- Jeremiah (Saadia Gaon)

As the Messiah:

- Targum Jonathan⁹⁰
- Sanhedrin 98a-b
- Ruth Rabbah 5:6
- Midrash Tanchuma Toldot 14
- Yalkut Shimoni 476
- Midrash Tehillim 2:7
- Maimonides, Letter to Yemen (*Iggeret Teman*)

The sources under "the Jewish Messiah" are readily accessible on the internet.

Maimonides (Rambam), one of the revered rabbis in Judaism, last in the list, is said to have viewed the Servant as an individual based on the interpretation he gives of Isaiah

52:15 and 53:2, in a letter he wrote to the Jewish community in Yemen; Epistele to Yemen (*Iggeret Teman*). Jewish outreach sources dispute this view. The Letter is only 20+ pages, and the disputed part comes toward the end. Readers can decide whether they agree that Maimonides believed the Servant was an individual or disagree. https://www.sefaria.org/Iggeret_HaRambam%2C_Iggeret_Teiman.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

∞ ∞ ∞

Yakov was not impressed with the above information and replied, "...you want to share what a Rabbi thousands of years ago thought Tanakh was saying. These people lived at a time when the pagans thought mental illness was demon possession, Leprosy was a curse from god." However, at another time, Yakov expressed a different opinion about 1st Century rabbis: "There were great sages during this time." He also said that the sages that stayed back in Babylon became "the Torah giants who spread across Europe, Latin America & created the Mishnah & Talmud, Yeshivas & Synagogues... There are many writings on these Torah giants and one can read about them."

This was early enough in our discussions that his reply surprised me. But it bears looking at for a couple of reasons. First, his reply had nothing to do with the reason he requested source information. Still more interesting, his reply showed he was just saying stuff he didn't necessarily believe because it was convenient at that moment. Sidestepping the hard evidence against his case was his *modus operandi*.

So I replied, "Dude, if you didn't want an answer, why did you ask the question?" Well... no, I didn't really say that. But I wish I had.

∞ ∞ ∞

NOTE: For more information on the Jewish point of view, I suggest reading the article, *Rabbinic Commentators After Rashi*, by Moshe Shulman. (Jews for Judaism website.⁹¹) The article covers, "the views of the commentators from the time of Rashi, respecting Isaiah 53." It is designed to prove that *all* "Orthodox" rabbis starting from Rashi (1040-1105 CE) viewed the Servant as the nation of Israel. Ironically, Shulman's *defense* turns out to be an own goal. Logically, if all Orthodox rabbis *after* Rashi believed the Servant was Israel, the flip side of the argument is that Orthodox rabbis *before* Rashi did *not* view the Servant as collective Israel. If rabbis of any stripe before the Middle Ages had viewed Israel as the Servant, Shulman would have mentioned them as the earliest point of reference in his article rather than beginning with rabbis in the Middle Ages.

∞ ∞ ∞

2. AN ARTICLE IN DEFENSE OF THE JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF ISAIAH 52/53

While mousing through the internet, the article *Isaiah 53 – The Suffering Servant*, popped up on my screen and I realized that it was the basis for other anti-missionary articles on Isaiah 52/53 that I had read.⁹² As such, it is a typical example of the Jewish argumentation as well as the aggressive style of presentation seen in such articles. I thought it would be good to review the article with Yakov because it reflects many of his questions and objections, some almost verbatim, and he heartily agreed.

The article is reproduced twice. First, unedited and without critical annotations so the reader can experience it fully for themselves. At first glance, the article seems formidable; the author delivers facts with the air of unquestionable authority, he emphasizes the

need to read the passage in Hebrew and he makes frequent reference to Christian “distortions and mistranslations” of the Hebrew text. My observations accompany the second presentation of the article. (If you have some extra time to spare, I encourage you to read the original article below.)

∞ ∞ ∞

ISAIAH 53 – THE SUFFERING SERVANT (by Marshall Roth)

Cutting through the distortions and mistranslations of this enigmatic text

The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is a beautiful, poetic song, one of the four Servant Songs in which the prophet describes the climactic period of world history when the Messiah will arrive and the Jewish people assume the role as the spiritual leaders of humanity.

Isaiah 53 is a prophecy foretelling how the world will react when they witness Israel's salvation in the Messianic era. The verses are presented from the perspective of world leaders, who contrast their former scornful attitude toward the Jews with their new realization of Israel's grandeur. After realizing how unfairly they treated the Jewish people, they will be shocked and speechless.

While the original Hebrew text clearly refers to the Jewish people as the “Suffering Servant,” over the centuries Isaiah 53 has become a cornerstone of the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Unfortunately, this claim is based on widespread mistranslations and distortion of context.

In order to properly understand these verses, one must read the original Hebrew text. When the Bible is translated into other languages, it loses much of its essence. The familiar King James translation uses language which is archaic and difficult for the modern reader. Furthermore, it is not rooted in Jewish sources and often goes against traditional Jewish teachings. Modern translations, while more readable, are often even more divorced from the true meaning of the text.

The Context of Isaiah 53

The key to deciphering any biblical text is to view it in context. Isaiah 53 is the fourth of the four Servant Songs. (The others are found in Isaiah chapters 42, 49 and 50.)

Though the “servant” in Isaiah 53 is not openly identified – these verses merely refer to “My servant” (52:13, 53:11) – the “servant” in each of the previous Servant Songs is plainly and repeatedly identified as the Jewish nation. Beginning with chapter 41, the equating of God’s Servant with the nation of Israel is made nine times by the prophet Isaiah, and no one other than Israel is identified as the “servant”:

- “You are My servant, O Israel” (41:8)
- “You are My servant, Israel” (49:3)
- see also Isaiah 44:1, 44:2, 44:21, 45:4, 48:20

The Bible is filled with other references to the Jewish people as God’s “servant”; see Jeremiah 30:10, 46:27-28; Psalms 136:22. There is no reason that the “servant” in Isaiah 53 would suddenly switch and refer to someone other than the Jewish people.

One obvious question that needs to be addressed: How can the “Suffering Servant,” which the verses refer to grammatically in the singular, be equated with the entire Jewish nation?

The Jewish people are consistently referred to with the singular pronoun.

This question evaporates when we discover that throughout the Bible, the Jewish people are consistently referred to as a singular entity, using the singular pronoun. For example, when God speaks to the entire Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, all of the Ten Commandments are written as if speaking to an individual (Exodus 20:1-14). This is because the Jewish people are one unit, bound together with a shared national destiny (see Exodus 4:22, Deuteronomy chapter 32). This singular reference is even more common in biblical verses referring to the Messianic era, when the Jewish people will be fully united under the banner of God (see Hosea 14:6-7, Jeremiah 50:19).

As we will see, for numerous reasons this chapter cannot be referring to Jesus. Even in the Christian scriptures, the disciples did not consider the Suffering Servant as referring to Jesus (see Matthew 16:21-22, Mark 9:31-32, Luke 9:44-45).

So how did the Suffering Servant come to be associated with Jesus? After his death, the promoters of Christianity retroactively looked into the Bible and “applied” – through mistranslation and distortion of context – these biblical verses as referring to Jesus. Missionary apologist Walter Riggans candidly admitted: “There is no self-evident blueprint in the Hebrew Bible which can be said to unambiguously point to Jesus. Only after one has come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and more specifically the kind of Messiah that he is, does it all begin to make sense...” (*Yehoshua Ben David*, Olive Press 1995, p.155)

The intention is not to denigrate another religion, but rather to understand the true meaning of the Divine word.

Isaiah 53 – Line by Line

Early in the Book of Isaiah, God predicts the long and difficult exile of the Jewish people. Chapter 53 occurs in the midst of Isaiah's "Messages of Consolation," which tell of the restoration of Israel to prominence as God's chosen people.

The key to understanding this chapter lies in correctly identifying who is speaking. Though the book was written by Isaiah, verses 53:1-10 are told from the perspective of world leaders. Following in the footsteps of the previous chapter (Isaiah 52:15 – “the kings will shut their mouths in amazement”), these verses describe how world leaders will be shocked with disbelief when God’s Servant Israel – despite all contrary expectations – is vindicated and blossoms in the Messianic Age.

(1) Who would believe what we have heard! For whom has the arm of God been revealed!

מִי הָאֱמִין לְשִׁמְעָתֵנוּ וְזָרוּעַ יְהוָה עַל מִי נִגְלָתָהּ

In this opening verse, world leaders are shocked at the incredible news of Israel’s salvation: “Who would believe what we have heard!”

This verse refers to “the arm of God.” Throughout the Jewish Bible, God's "arm" (זָרוּעַ) always denotes a redemption of the Jewish people from physical persecution. For example, God took the Jews out of Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” (Deut. 26:8). (See also Exodus 3:20, 6:6, 14:31, 15:6; Deut. 4:34, 7:19; Isaiah 51:9, 52:10, 62:8, 63:12; Jeremiah 21:5, 27:5; Ezekiel 20:33; Psalms 44:3, 89:11, 98:1, 136:12).

(2) He formerly grew like a sapling or a root from dry ground; he had neither form nor beauty. We saw him, but without a desirable appearance.

וַיַּעַל כַּיּוֹנֵק לִפְנֵי וַיִּכְשַׁרְשׁ מֵאַרְצָ צִיָּה לֹא תֵאָר לוֹ וְלֹא הָדָר וְנִרְאָהוּ וְלֹא מְרָאָה וְנִחְמְדָהוּ

This imagery of a tree struggling to grow in dry earth is a metaphor for the Jewish struggle in exile. A young sapling in dry ground appears that it will die. The Jews were always a small nation, at times as small as 2 million people, threatened with extinction. In this verse Isaiah describes Israel's miraculous return from exile, like a sapling that sprouts from this dry ground. This idea appears throughout the Jewish Bible (see Isaiah 60:21, Ezekiel 19:13, Hosea 14:6-7, Amos 9:15).

(3) He was despised and rejected of men, a man of pains and accustomed to sickness. As one from whom we [THE NATIONS] would hide our faces, he was despised, and we had no regard for him.

נִבְזָה וְחֻדַּל אִישִׁים אִישׁ מְכַאֲבוֹת וַיְדוּעַ חֲלִי וּכְמִסְתֵּר פָּנִים מִמֶּנּוּ נִבְזָה וְלֹא חֲשַׁבְנָהוּ

This verse describes the Servant as universally despised and rejected. This has been a historical theme for the Jewish people, as a long list of oppressors have treated the Jews as sub-human (the Nazis) or as a pariah state (the United Nations). See similar imagery in Isaiah 49:7, 60:15; Psalms 44:14; Nechemia 3:36.

While this description clearly applies to Israel, it cannot be reconciled with the New Testament account which describes Jesus as immensely popular (Matthew 4:25). "Large crowds" of people came from far and wide to hear him speak, and Jesus had to sail into the water to avoid being overrun by the crowds (Mark 3:7-9). Luke 2:52 describes him as physically strong and well respected, a man whose popularity spread and was "praised by all" (Luke 4:14-15). A far cry from Isaiah's description of "despised and rejected."

Although Jesus died a criminal's death, Isaiah is describing someone for whom rejection has spanned the ages – obviously referring to a nation, not an individual who suffered rejection for only a few hours.

(4) Indeed, he bore our illnesses and carried our pains – but we regarded him as diseased, stricken by God and afflicted.

אָכֵן חָלִינוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמְכַאֲבֵינוּ סָבְלָם וְאַנְחוּנוּ חֲשַׁבְנָהוּ נִגּוּעַ מִכָּה אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲפָה

Throughout the centuries of Israel's exile, many nations persecuted the Jews on the pretense that it was God's way of "punishing" the "accursed" Jews for having stubbornly rejected the new religions. In these verses, until the end of the chapter, the nations confess how they used the Jewish people as scapegoats, not for the "noble" reasons they had long claimed.

Indeed, the nations selfishly persecuted the Jews as a distraction from their own corrupt regimes: "Surely our suffering he did bear, and our pains he carried..." (53:4)

(5) He was wounded as a result of our transgressions, and crushed as a result of our iniquities. The chastisement upon him was for our benefit; and through his wounds we were healed.

וְהוּא מִחֻלָּל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּכָא מִעֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ

This verse describes how the humbled world leaders confess that Jewish suffering occurred as a direct result of “our iniquities” – i.e., depraved Jew-hatred, rather than, as previously claimed, the stubborn blindness of the Jews.

Isaiah 53:5 is a classic example of mistranslation: The verse does not say, “He was wounded *for* our transgressions and crushed *for* our iniquities,” which could convey the vicarious suffering ascribed to Jesus. Rather, the proper translation is: “He was wounded *because of* our transgressions, and crushed *because of* our iniquities.” This conveys that the Servant suffered as a result of the sinfulness of others – not the opposite as Christians contend – that the Servant suffered to atone for the sins of others.

Indeed, the Christian idea directly contradicts the basic Jewish teaching that God promises forgiveness to all who sincerely return to Him; thus there is no need for the Messiah to atone for others (Isaiah 55:6-7, Jeremiah 36:3, Ezekiel chapters 18 and 33, Hosea 14:1-3, Jonah 3:6-10, Proverbs 16:6, Daniel 4:27, 2-Chronicles 7:14).

(6) We have all strayed like sheep, each of us turning his own way, and God inflicted upon him [Israel] the iniquity of us all.

כָּלֵנוּ כָצֵאן תַעֲיִינוּ אִישׁ לְדֶרֶכוֹ פָּנִינוּ וַיהוָה הִפְגִיעַ בּוֹ אֶת עוֹן כָּלֵנוּ.

The nations realize that their lack of proper leadership (“shepherd”) caused them to treat the Jews with disdain. They further acknowledge how punishments that should have befallen the nations were averted through Israel’s suffering.

(7) He was persecuted and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth. Like a sheep being led to the slaughter or a lamb that is silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.

נִגְשׁ וְהוּא נִעְנָה וְלֹא יִפְתַּח פִּיו כִּשֶׁה לְטֹבַח יוֹבֵל וְכִרְחֵל לִפְנֵי גִזְזִיָּה נֶאֱלָמָה וְלֹא יִפְתַּח פִּיו

In various contexts, the Bible uses the imagery of “sheep led to the slaughter” specifically in reference to the Jewish people. For example: “You give us as sheep to be eaten and have scattered us among the nations... we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Psalms 44:12, 23).

This verse prophesizes the many hardships – both physical torment and economic exploitation – that the Jews endured in exile. Ironically, this prophecy refers in part to the 11th century Crusaders who “persecuted and afflicted” the Jews in the name of Jesus. In our time, while Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were “led to the slaughter,” they still remained like a “lamb that is silent before her shearers” – without complaints against God.

(8) He was released from captivity and judgment; who could have imagined such a generation? For he was removed from the land of the living; because of my people's sin they were afflicted.

מֵעֶצֶר וּמִמִּשְׁפָּט לְקָח וְאֶת דְּוָרוֹ מִי יְשׁוּחֵם כִּי נִגְזַר מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים מִפֶּשַׁע עַמִּי נִגַּע לְמוֹ

The phrase, “land of the living” (*Eretz HaChaim*) refers specifically to the Land of Israel. Thus this verse, “He was removed from the land of the living,” does not mean that the servant was killed, but rather was exiled from the Land of Israel.

This verse again describes the world's surprise at witnessing the Jewish return to the Promised Land. "Who could have imagined" that the nation we tortured now prospers? World leaders offer a stunning confession: "Because of my people's sin, they [the Jews] were afflicted."

Here the text makes absolutely clear that the oppressed Servant is a collective nation, not a single individual. This is where knowledge of biblical Hebrew is absolutely crucial. At the end of the verse, the Hebrew word for "they were" (*lamoh* – לָמוּ) always refers to a group, never to an individual. (see for example, Psalms 99:7)

(9) He submitted his grave to evil people; and the wealthy submitted to his executions, for committing no crime, and with no deceit in his mouth.

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת רִשְׁעֵיהֶם קִבְרוֹ וְאֶת עֲשִׂיר בְּמַתָּיו עַל לֹא חֲמָס עָשָׂה וְלֹא מְרֻמָּה בִּפְּיוֹ

Missionaries cite this verse as a claim that Jesus lived a sinless life, and was thus the Messiah. This is contradicted, however, by the Gospels themselves, who record that Jesus sinned by violating the Sabbath (John 9:16) and – by claiming to be God Himself – violating the grave prohibition against making any physical image of God (John 10:33, 14:9-10).

Throughout history, Jews were given the choice to "convert or die." Yet as this verse describes, there was "no deceit in his mouth" – the loyal Jews refused to accept a pagan deity as their God. Rather than profane God's Holy Name, they "submitted to the grave" – i.e. chose to die rather than renounce their faith. As such these Jews were often denied proper burial, discarded "to the grave as evil people."

Further, wealthy Jews "submitted to his executions, for committing no crime" – killed so that wicked conquerors could confiscate their riches.

(10) God desired to oppress him and He afflicted him. If his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring and live long days, and God's purpose would succeed in his hand.

וַיְהִי חֲפֹץ דְּכַאֵל הִחֲלִי אִם תִּשְׁכַּח אֶשְׁמִי נִפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה זָרַע יִאֲרִיךְ יָמָיו וְחֲפֹץ יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלַח

"God desired to oppress" the Jewish people, in order to inspire them to return to Torah observance. If the Jews would only "acknowledge guilt," they would see their "offspring and live long days." This refers to the Messianic era when all Jews will return to Torah observance.

This verse emphasizes that the Servant is to be rewarded with long life and many children. This verse could not possibly refer to Jesus who, according to the New Testament, died young and childless. (Furthermore, if Jesus was alleged to be the immortal Son of God, it is absurd to apply the concept of "living long days.")

Although missionaries may claim that the "offspring" refers to spiritual descendants, this is based on a distortion and mistranslation. In this verse, the Hebrew word for "offspring" (*zera* - זָרַע) always refers to physical descendants (see Genesis 12:7, 15:2-4, 15:13, 46:6; Exodus 28:43). A different word, *banim* (בָּנִים), generally translated as "sons," is used to refer to spiritual descendants (see Deuteronomy 14:1).

(11) He would see the purpose and be satisfied with his soul's distress. With his knowledge My servant will cause the masses to be righteous; and he will bear their sins.

מַעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׁבַּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ יִצְדִּיק צַדִּיק עַבְדִּי לְרַבִּים וְעוֹנֵתָם הוּא יִסְבֵּל

Missionaries cite this verse to claim that Jesus died for our sins. The Christian idea of one's sins being forgiven through the suffering of another person goes against the basic biblical teaching that each individual has to atone for his own sins by repenting. (Exodus 32:32-33, De 24:16, Ezekiel 18:1-4)

This verse describes how God's Servant "will cause the masses to be righteous" – not as some mistranslate, "he will justify the many." The Jewish mission is to serve as a "light to the nations," leading the world to righteousness through knowledge of the one true God. The Jews will accomplish this both by example (De 4:5-8; Zechariah 8:23) and by instructing the nations in God's Law (Isaiah 2:3-4; Micah 4:2-3). As it says: "The world will become full of the knowledge of God, as water covers the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

(12) Therefore, I will assign him a portion in public and he will divide the mighty as spoils – in return for having poured out his soul for death and being counted among the wicked, for he bore the sin of the many, and prayed for the wicked.

לֵכֵן אֶחְלֶק לוֹ בְּרַבִּים וְאֶת עֲצוּמִים יַחְלֶק שְׁלָל תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הִעָרָה לְמוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ וְאֶת פְּשָׁעִים נִמְנָה וְהוּא חֲטָא רַבִּים נָשָׂא וְלִפְשָׁעִים יַפְגִּיעַ

This verse speaks of how the Jews always pray for the welfare of the nations they are exiled into (see Jeremiah 29:7). The verse continues to explain that the Jewish people, who righteously bore the sins of the world and yet remained faithful to God, will be rewarded.

Regarding the above passage, some have claimed that the "suffering servant" cannot be Israel, since Israel has sins. Yet this is a fallacy, since we know that no human being – not even Moses – is completely free of sin. Yet Moses was considered "righteous," which takes into account not only one's good deeds, but also one's repentance after sin. If Jesus is God, these ideas have no meaning.

Immediately following this promise of reward for the Jews' suffering (53:10-12), chapter 54 clearly speaks of the redemption which awaits the Jewish people. This point is acknowledged by all Christian commentaries.

Conclusion

In the days of Jesus, nobody ever understood Isaiah 53 to be predicting the death of the Messiah. When Jesus said, "I am going to Jerusalem where I will suffer and die," the Apostle Peter did not relate this in any way to the suffering described in Isaiah 53. Rather, Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, "Be it far from you Lord, this shall not be unto you." In other words, "God forbid – that cannot happen to you!" Peter never expected the Messiah to be tortured and killed (see Matthew 16:21-22).

Interestingly, the 20th century Christian *New English Bible – Oxford Study Edition* (annotation on Isaiah 52:13-53:12) clearly identifies the Suffering Servant as the nation of Israel which "has suffered as a humiliated individual."

If the context of Isaiah 53 so clearly refers to the Jewish people, how could so many Christian leaders have mistranslated the Bible? History shows that – for whatever motivation – many did so knowingly:

- Lucius Coelius Firmianes Lactantius, 3rd century Church leader: "Among those who seek power and gain from their religion, there will never be wanting an inclination to forge and lie for it."
- St. Gregory, 4th century Bishop of Nanzanzus: "A little jargon is all that is necessary to impose on the people. The less they comprehend, the more they admire. Our forefathers and doctors have often said not what they thought, but what circumstances and necessity dictated."
- Dr. Herbert Marsh, 19th century English Bishop: "It is a certain fact that several readings in our common printed text are nothing more than alterations made by Origen..."
- Walter Brueggemann Ph.D., an ordained minister and author of 60 books on the Bible, writes: "[A]lthough it is clear that this poetry does not have Jesus in any first instance on its horizon, it is equally clear that the church, from the outset, has found the poetry a poignant and generative way to consider Jesus, wherein humiliation equals crucifixion and exaltation equals resurrection and ascension."

Why It Matters

When all the verses have been parsed, and all the proofs have been presented, one still might wonder: What difference does it make who is right?

The theological gap between Judaism and Christianity is not limited to the question: "Who is the Messiah," or a debate over the translation of a few biblical verses. Judaism and Christianity are two different belief systems, differing over core issues such as the existential nature of man, the role of our relationship with God, and the path to genuine spiritual fulfillment.

Jews have held steadfast to their beliefs for thousands of years, amidst all forms of persecution and hardship. They have done so in the belief that the Jewish people – as bearers of God's message of morality and justice – have a unique and crucial role to play in human history. As the prophet Isaiah predicts, this will become eminently clear when the Messiah, the King of Israel, arrives. May it be speedily in our day.

∞ ∞ ∞

3. ANALYSIS OF THE ARTICLE: *ISAIAH 53 – THE SUFFERING SERVANT*

Did you find Roth's article challenging? There is a lot going on that the general reader could hardly be expected to deal with. But for all the bravado, the article is a paper tiger.

Roth is basically a storyteller. He weaves a narrative of Isaiah 52/53, which he must feel is enough to convince his audience without the necessity of facts. Instead of actually proving his case, he launches unsupported accusations against Christian translations. Along the way, he suppresses information, ignores difficult questions in the Bible text, and presents verifiably false information. (All of this is dealt with in the analysis). When these tactics are understood, and the *facts* confronted, the paper tiger quickly loses its teeth.

Here is the same article again but with commentary. To be clear, the main objective of the analysis below is to deconstruct the article and show that Roth's claims and accusations are false. Our goal was to help Yakov to see that sources of this nature are tainted and the sole reliance on them is not a wise choice.

ARTICLE	ANALYSIS
<p><i>Cutting through the distortions and mistranslations of this enigmatic text</i></p> <p>The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is a beautiful, poetic song, one of the four “Servant Songs” in which the prophet describes the climactic period of world history when the Messiah will arrive and the Jewish people assume the role as the spiritual leaders of humanity.</p> <p>Isaiah 53 is a prophecy foretelling how the world will react when they witness Israel's salvation in the Messianic era. The verses are presented from the perspective of world leaders, who contrast their former scornful attitude toward the Jews with their new realization of Israel's grandeur. After realizing how unfairly they treated the Jewish people, they will be shocked and speechless.</p>	<p>“Distortions and mistranslations.” This is the subtext of Roth’s article, mentioned throughout, and it sets the tone. It is called an <i>ad hominem</i> attack; discrediting an argument by character assassination.</p> <p>It is an effective tactic; the accusation of Christian dishonesty will cause Jewish readers to be incensed and Christians to be appalled and embarrassed: “Maybe the Jewish interpretation is correct after all. Could it be that Jesus is not really the Messiah? Do I have to stop eating pork... must I get circumcised?”</p> <p>“After realizing how unfairly they treated the Jewish people, they will be shocked and speechless.” This is storytelling – supposition – presented as fact.</p> <p>Here is the text: Isaiah 52:15 “So he will startle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths before him, because <i>they will see what they had not been told</i> and give consideration to <i>what they had not heard</i>.”</p> <p>It does not say that the kings realized “how unfairly they treated the Jewish people.” The supposition is not part of the text. The tactic is repeated throughout the article: <i>CAVEAT LECTOR</i>, “Let the reader beware.”</p>
<p>While the original Hebrew text clearly refers to the Jewish people as the “Suffering Servant,” over the centuries Isaiah 53 has become a cornerstone of the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah.</p> <p>Unfortunately, this claim is based on widespread mistranslations and distortion of context.</p>	<p>“<u>over the centuries</u> Isaiah 53 has become a cornerstone of the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah.” From the very inception of Christianity, Isaiah 53 has been a “cornerstone” of the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah. This is dealt with below.—See also <i>References to Isaiah 52/53 Were Added to the Christian Scriptures Much Later</i>, Chapter 3.</p> <p>Again: “widespread mistranslations and distortion.” Just get used to it.</p>
<p>In order to properly understand these verses, one must read the original Hebrew text. When the Bible is translated into other languages, it loses much of its essence. The familiar</p>	<p>“When the Bible is translated into other languages, it loses much of its essence.” The statement is not true; the <i>essence</i> of the Bible message is not lost in translation.</p>

King James translation uses language which is archaic and difficult for the modern reader. Furthermore, it is not rooted in Jewish sources and often goes against traditional Jewish teachings.

Modern translations, while more readable, are often even more divorced from the true meaning of the text.

Capture the full literary brilliance and poetic beauty of the Hebrew in a translation is challenging, but the *essence* of the message is there and understandable. Like translating other great works, Cervantes from Spanish, or Dostoevsky from Russian, into another language. The essence is not lost, and a skillful translator can convey much of the beauty and wit of the original language into the translation.

“Modern translations... are often... divorced from the true meaning of the text!” The author is saying: *Only* Hebrew can cut it. Roth omits the significant fact that there are many fine Jewish translations in English that read exactly like the Christian ones. Is the omission of this point due to lack of knowledge or is it willful? Either answer is uncomplimentary for the author.

The Context of Isaiah 53

The key to deciphering any biblical text is to view it in context. Isaiah 53 is the fourth of the four “Servant Songs.” (The others are found in Isaiah chapters 42, 49 and 50.) Though the “servant” in Isaiah 53 is not openly identified – these verses merely refer to “My servant” (52:13, 53:11). – **the “servant” in each of the previous Servant Songs is plainly and repeatedly identified as the Jewish nation.**

Beginning with chapter 41, the equating of God’s Servant with the nation of Israel is made nine times by the prophet Isaiah, and **no one other than Israel is identified as the “servant”:**

“...the “servant” in each of the previous Servant Songs is plainly and repeatedly identified as the Jewish nation... no one other than Israel is identified as the ‘servant.’” His interpretation is served up as if it were a unassailable fact. But the facts themselves are erroneous, especially when he says, “no one other than Israel is identified as the ‘servant.’”

The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (article *Servant of God*: Special usage in Isaiah) offers a different opinion to Roth’s, “There are, however, four passages in the Isaian compilation where perhaps the ‘national’ interpretation is not admissible, namely, Isa. 42:1-4, 44:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12. The descriptions in them of the attitude and conduct of the ‘ebed Yhwh seem to be idealizations of the character of an individual rather than of the whole of Israel. Especially is this true of Isa. 52:13-53:12, the exaltation of the ‘man of suffering.’ In this a prophetic anticipatory picture of the Messiah has been recognized by both Jewish and Christian tradition.”

The Jewish Study Bible (JSB) adds, “The identification of the servant in these verses and in other related chapters [42, 49, 50 and 52/53] is *hotly debated*.” The *JSB* mentions six different Rabbinic opinions as to the identity of the servant. This is a far cry from, “plainly and repeatedly identified as the Jewish Nation.”

After a closer look at Isaiah chapters 42, 49 and 50 readers can judge for themselves whether the nation of Israel is “plainly and repeatedly identified as the Jewish nation.”

Isaiah 42:1 Similarly, the Haredi *Artscroll* translation comments on the identity of the Servant according to the *Targum*: “The Messiah.” Roth makes no mention of contrary views. (The Targum is a Jewish Aramaic translation/semi-commentary, of the Tanakh).—Endnote 90.

Isaiah 42:1 mentions two different Servants each with a distinct description. The first Servant (Isaiah 42:1-7), who goes unnamed, has the assignment to “open blind eyes; to remove... dwellers in darkness from a dungeon.” The second Servant, Israel, is described as being *blinder and deafer* than anyone else and “hidden away in prisons.” (Isaiah 42:18, 22, 24) Obviously, the unnamed Servant’s mission is to lead Israel, the “blind and deaf” Servant, out of the darkness of captivity. Roth skips all of this.

Isaiah 49:3 “You are my servant, Israel,” seems conclusive, but *JSB* has this to say, “The identity of the servant has generated much debate. Most Rabbinic commentators and some modern scholars argue that Deutero-Isaiah speaks here in the first person and that these verses describe the prophet’s own mission.”

JSB is saying, “*Most* Rabbinic commentators and some modern scholars” do *not* see the nation of Israel as the Servant in this passage.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>“You are My servant, O Israel” (41:8).</u> • <u>“You are My servant, Israel” (49:3).</u> • <u>see also Isaiah 44:1, 44:2, 44:21, 45:4, 48:20.</u> 	<p>Even <i>Artscroll</i> agrees in its footnote on Isaiah 49:1: “As he prepares to prophesy regarding many countries, <i>Isaiah</i> stresses that God selected him for this purpose.” (<i>Artscroll</i> refers to Isaiah again in its note on Isaiah 49:4.)</p> <p>Isaiah 50: Israel is not mentioned in this chapter. <i>Artscroll</i> comments on verses 4-9, “Isaiah speaks of both his own readiness to be God’s spokesman and God’s readiness to inspire him (Radak).”</p> <p>Roth gets a bit over his skis in saying that Israel is “plainly and repeatedly” identified as the Servant in chapters 42, 49 and 50.</p> <p>What Roth does next bears watching closely (think of the old shell game). To <i>prove</i> his statement that the Servant Songs (Isaiah 42, 49 and 50) “<i>plainly and repeatedly</i>” identify Israel as the Servant, he cites six texts: Isaiah 41:1; 41:8; 44:2; 44:21; 45:4; 48:20. Six texts! “Well that settles the matter, doesn’t it?” It might, except for the fact that none of the texts he cites are from the Servant Song passages he has just mentioned. This is called, “misdirection,” or “bait and switch.”</p> <p>A PAUSE FOR CLARITY: Misdirection, bait and switch, is on another level from Roth’s other tactics. Here’s how it works; he gains our trust by his admission that Isaiah 53 does not name the Servant (like the guy with three cups who gains the trust of his “mark” by letting him guess which cup the pea is under). So we relax our guard, and then Roth directs our attention to texts that are <i>not</i> the Servant passages he just mentioned.</p> <p>This is classic <i>misdirection</i>, and it is always, inevitably, an act of intentional deception. Like the old shell game; no one playing it ever said, “Oops, I misdirected you by <i>mistake</i>,” as he took money from the person he tricked. Similarly, Roth’s act of misdirection is intentional, and, by definition, it is dishonest.</p>
<p>The Bible is filled with other references to the Jewish people as God’s “servant”;</p>	<p>“There is <u>no</u> reason that the “servant” in Isaiah 53 would suddenly switch and</p>

<p>see Jeremiah 30:10, 46:27-28; Psalms 136:22. There is no reason that the “servant” in Isaiah 53 would suddenly switch and refer to someone other than the Jewish people.</p>	<p>refer to someone other than the Jewish people.” The author begins with the unproven assumption that the previous verses (Isaiah 52:13-15) are about Israel. Are they? The rabbis didn’t think so until the Middle Ages, and neither do many Jewish sources today. (See the <i>Jewish Encyclopaedia</i>, above.) And the identity of the Servant may switch suddenly in Isaiah’s writings, as discussed above (compare Isaiah 42:1 with 42:19; and 49:3 with 49:6).</p> <p>The author would like his readers to conclude that Israel is the only Servant mentioned in Isaiah. However, others are called God’s Servant: Isaiah (Isaiah 20:12), Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20), David (Isaiah 37:35), and the unnamed “Servant.”—Isaiah 42:1; 50:11; 52:13; 53:11.</p> <p>Finally, the twelve times Israel is identified as “my servant” in Isaiah, it is always by name, without any ambiguity. In contrast, the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 is anonymous. Since Israel is not referred to by name as being the Servant in Isaiah 52/53, the most reasonable assumption is that Israel is <i>not</i> the Servant in this passage. This was certainly not missed by the rabbis and sages who described the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 as an individual for some 1800 years.</p> <p>Certain passages, including Isaiah 52/53, are called “Servant Songs,” and not “Israel the Servant Songs,” precisely because the Servant is anonymous in these passages.</p>
<p>One obvious question that needs to be addressed: How can the “Suffering Servant,” which the verses refer to grammatically in the singular, be equated with the entire Jewish nation?</p> <p>The Jewish people are consistently referred to with the singular pronoun.</p> <p>This question evaporates when we discover that throughout the Bible, the Jewish people are consistently referred to as a singular entity, using the singular</p>	<p>“The Jewish people are consistently referred to with the singular pronoun.” The statement is untrue, as Hebrew readers of the Tanakh are aware. (Roth may not know Hebrew.)</p> <p>Israel is referred to with both singular and plural pronouns. (This is not clear in English since the singular and plural <i>you</i> are the same. Down South they say <i>y’all</i> as a plural you.) Roth quotes Exodus 20:1-14 where the singular pronoun is used but</p>

<p>pronoun. For example, when God speaks to the entire Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, all of the Ten Commandments are written as if speaking to an individual (Exodus 20:1-14. This is because the Jewish people are one unit, bound together with a shared national destiny (see Exodus 4:22, Deuteronomy chapter 32). This singular reference is even more common in biblical verses referring to the Messianic era, when the Jewish people will be fully united under the banner of God (see Hosea 14:6-7, Jeremiah 50:19).</p>	<p>omits verse 22 where the plural [אַתָּם...אֲנִי] is used twice in reference to Israel, "Jehovah went on to say to Moses: "This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, 'YOU [אַתָּם] have seen that it was from the heavens I spoke with YOU [אֲנִי]." (The <i>NW Reference Bible</i> has "YOU" in caps to indicate the plural.)</p> <p>Deuteronomy 32, also cited by Roth as a <i>proof</i> text, has the plural personal pronoun <i>you</i> [אַתָּם] in Deuteronomy 32:38, and <i>they</i>, in Deuteronomy 32:16, 17 and 21.</p> <p>God refers to Israel with the plural <i>you</i> many times over throughout the Tanakh. For example, Isaiah 43:10, "YOU [אַתָּם] are my witnesses, is the utterance of Jehovah, even my servant whom I have chosen, in order that YOU [אַתָּם] may know and have faith in me, and that YOU [אַתָּם] may understand that I am the same One."—<i>NW Reference Bible</i>.</p>
<p>As we will see, for numerous reasons this chapter cannot be referring to Jesus. Even in the Christian scriptures, the disciples did not consider the Suffering Servant as referring to Jesus (see Matthew 16:21-22, Mark 9:31-32, Luke 9:44-45).</p>	<p>"...the disciples did not consider the Suffering Servant as referring to Jesus." The statement is false but strikes a chord with those unfamiliar with the Christian Scriptures. It is discussed in depth below.</p>
<p>Missionary apologist Walter Riggans candidly admitted: "There is no self-evident blueprint in the Hebrew Bible which can be said to unambiguously point to Jesus. <u>Only after one has come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and more specifically the kind of Messiah that he is, does it all begin to make sense...</u>" (<i>Yehoshua Ben David</i>, Olive Press 1995, p.155)</p>	<p>The quote is interesting. Riggans describes a two-step conversion process; 1) The convert accepts Jesus, 2) Then accepts the texts in the Tanakh that are alleged to be prophecies about Jesus. However, this process does not reflect my personal experience nor that of many other Israelis that I know.</p> <p>I became interested in the Bible in High School and was impressed with the continuity of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Once I saw that the portrayal of Jesus in the Christian Scriptures was different to the way the late-night fire and brimstone preachers portrayed him, I was able to read passages such as Isaiah 53; Daniel 9 etc, without prejudice, and became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. In other words, I accepted that Jesus was the foretold Messiah <i>because</i> of those prophecies, and not the other way</p>

<p>The intention is not to denigrate another religion, but rather to understand the true meaning of the Divine word.</p>	<p>around. No visions and no mystical experience, just conversion due to textual considerations, pure and simple. My case, like many others, is the opposite of the 2-step process Riggins described.</p> <p>“The intention is not to denigrate another religion.” This is a warm touch! It would be more convincing if previous and succeeding paragraphs weren’t laced with accusations of “mistranslations and distortion.”</p>
<p>Isaiah 53 – Line by Line Early in the Book of Isaiah, God predicts the long and difficult exile of the Jewish people.</p> <p>Chapter 53 occurs in the midst of Isaiah's "Messages of Consolation," which tell of the restoration of Israel to prominence as God's chosen people.</p>	<p>“God predicts the long and difficult exile of the Jewish people.” Isn’t the allegation that Isaiah 53 predicts the “long exile” of the Jews, akin to saying that God predestined the Jews to 2500+ years of indescribable suffering... that he condemned them before they sinned!</p> <p>“Isaiah's ‘Messages of Consolation...’” The prophet’s “messages of consolation” were in reference to Israel’s return to Jerusalem after 70 years in Babylon. That was exile enough!</p>
<p>The key to understanding this chapter lies in correctly identifying who is speaking.</p> <p>Though the book was written by Isaiah, verses 53:1-10 are told from the perspective of world leaders. Following in the footsteps of the previous chapter (Isaiah 52:15 – “the kings will shut their mouths in amazement”), these verses describe how world leaders will be shocked with disbelief when God’s Servant Israel – despite all contrary expectations – is vindicated and blossoms in the Messianic age.</p>	<p>“The key to understanding this chapter lies in correctly identifying who is speaking... 53:1-10 are told from the perspective of world leaders” Roth nails it: Are the narrators in Isaiah 53:1-10 world leaders or Israelites looking back on the Servant’s life? The answer is essential to determine whether or not the Servant is an individual and, if so, who that individual might be.</p> <p>Here are three reasons why the narrator(s) in chapter 53 are Israelites, and not the world leaders mentioned in 52:15. (The verse-by verse analysis of Isaiah 52/53 in Chapter 1, deals with this issue in detail.)</p> <p>The narrator’s perspective: The narrators speak in the past tense, looking back on the Servant’s life, <i>after</i> his death. They must be Israelites because the world leaders “had not heard... not been told,” details about the Servant.—Isaiah 52:13.</p> <p>Hebrew Expressions: The narrators in chapter 53 use Hebrew expressions: “my people” (53:8) “Jehovah” (53:1, 10), “guilt</p>

	<p>offering.” (53:10) Only Israelites would use such expressions, not the gentiles.</p> <p>The description of the Servant does not fit Israel: Isaiah 53:9, 10 says, “he had done no wrong... no deception in his mouth... 10 the righteous one, my servant...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaiah 66:3 “The one sacrificing a sheep is like one breaking the neck of a dog. The one offering a gift—like the blood of a pig... They have chosen their own ways, and they take delight in what is disgusting.”
<p>(53:1) Who would believe what we have heard! For whom has the arm of God been revealed!</p> <p>In this opening verse, world leaders are shocked at the incredible news of Israel’s salvation: “Who would believe what we have heard!”</p> <p>This verse refers to “the arm of God.” Throughout the Jewish Bible, God’s “arm” (זרוע) always denotes a redemption of the Jewish people from physical persecution. For example, God took the Jews out of Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” (Deut. 26:8). (See also Exodus 3:20, 6:6, 14:31, 15:6; Deut. 4:34, 7:19; Isaiah 51:9, 52:10, 62:8, 63:12; Jeremiah 21:5, 27:5; Ezekiel 20:33; Psalms 44:3, 89:11, 98:1, 136:12).</p>	<p>“...God’s ‘arm’ (זרוע) <u>always</u> denotes a redemption of the Jewish people from physical persecution.” This is a Hebrew expression used by Israelites, not gentiles.</p> <p>The term is not always used in reference to the Jewish people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaiah 51:5 “In me the islands will hope, and for <i>my arm</i> they will wait.” <p>(If you’re thinking that “islands” might refer to <i>Jewish islands</i>, don’t.)</p>
<p>(53:2) He formerly grew like a sapling or a root from dry ground; he had neither form nor beauty. We saw him, but without a desirable appearance.</p> <p>This imagery of a tree struggling to grow in dry earth is a metaphor for the Jewish struggle in exile. A young sapling in dry ground appears that it will die. The Jews were always a small nation, at times as small as 2 million people, threatened with extinction.</p>	<p>“...like a sapling... is a metaphor for the Jewish struggle in exile.” Are the kings talking in tender terms about millennia of Jewish struggle, or are these Israelites talking about the Servant’s humble beginnings? The author ignores other well-known similar texts that Jewish sages applied to the Messiah.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaiah 11:1-3 “And there must go forth a <i>twig</i> out of the stump of Jesse; and out of his roots a <i>sprout</i> will be fruitful. 2 And upon him the spirit of Jehovah must settle down, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of mightiness, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah.”

In this verse **Isaiah describes Israel's miraculous return from exile**, like a sapling that sprouts from this dry ground. This idea appears throughout the Jewish Bible (see Isaiah 60:21, Ezekiel 19:13, Hosea 14:6-7, Amos 9:15).

- **Zechariah 6:12** "And you must say to him, this is what Jehovah of armies has said: Here is the man whose name is *Sprout*. And from his own place he will sprout, and he will certainly build the temple of Jehovah."

NOTE: In writing about the Messiah, Yakov quoted Isaiah 11:10, part of the passage beginning in 11:1, "Tanakh tells me that the nations will listen to the Messiah."

"...Isaiah describes Israel's miraculous return from exile." As above, the verse describes lowly beginnings. Even if applied to Israel, it would still be a reference to Israel's origins; rising from nomadic patriarchs, becoming a slave nation in Egypt and their miraculous liberation. But not after that time, and certainly not a reference to millenniums of struggle.

(53:3) He was despised and rejected of men, a man of pains and accustomed to sickness. As one from whom we would hide our faces, he was despised, and we had no regard for him.

This verse describes the Servant as universally despised and rejected. This has been a historical theme for the Jewish people, as a long list of oppressors have treated the Jews as sub-human (the **Nazis**) or as a pariah state (the United Nations). See similar imagery in Isaiah 49:7, 60:15; Psalms 44:14; Nechemia 3:36.

While **this description** clearly applies to Israel, it **cannot be reconciled with the New Testament account which describes Jesus as immensely popular** (Matthew 4:25). "Large crowds" of people came from far and wide to hear him speak, and Jesus had to sail into the water to avoid being overrun by the crowds (Mark 3:7-9). Luke 2:52 describes him as physically strong and well respected, a man whose popularity spread and was "praised by all" (Luke

"This verse describes the Servant as universally despised and rejected." The text does not say "universally." This is no more than embellished storytelling.

"Nazis." Nazis are mentioned as part of a long list of Israel's oppressors. Jewish suffering is mentioned here but the explanation reaches a crescendo in the interpretation of 53:7 and 10.

"...this description... cannot be reconciled with the New Testament account... which describes Jesus as immensely popular." This comes up often in anti-missionary articles and was also mentioned by you [Yakov].

The objection reveals a lack of familiarity with the Christian Scriptures on the part of those making it. (See the verse-by-verse

<p>4:14-15). A far cry from Isaiah's description of "despised and rejected."</p> <p>Although Jesus died a criminal's death, Isaiah is describing someone for whom rejection has spanned the ages – obviously referring to a nation, not an individual who suffered rejection for only a few hours.</p>	<p>discussion of Isaiah 52/53, under Isaiah 53:3, Chapter 1.)</p> <p>"...Isaiah is describing someone for whom rejection has <u>spanned the ages</u>, <u>obviously</u> referring to a nation, not an individual who suffered rejection for only a few hours." This is another argument that you [Yakov] have mentioned.</p> <p>If the text actually said the rejection of the Servant "spanned the ages," then it would "obviously" be referring to Israel. But the text does not say, "spanned the ages." This is not debatable translation or even conjecture. This is unwarranted embellishment. Roth just pulled a rabbit out of his hat. He builds on supposition and then calls his conclusions <i>obvious</i>. The implication is that anyone who can't see the <i>obvious</i> must be intellectually deficient. "How dare you contradict me, you...!"</p> <p>"...an individual who suffered <i>rejection for only a few hours</i>." The comment is referring to Jesus. Here again, either the author does not have a grasp of the Christian Scriptures or there is something else going on. (Full discussion in verse-by-verse analysis under Isaiah 53:7.)</p> <p>The following quote is from <i>Ha-natzrut ha-kduma</i>, a textbook for 7th graders published by the Israeli Ministry of Education. "The words and deeds of Yeshu stirred up a good deal of resistance, both among the country people and, much more, among the ruling elite."—<i>Israelis, Jews and Jesus</i>, by Pinchas Lapide, page 53.</p> <p>So, even 7th graders in Israel know that Jesus faced a lot more opposition than "only a few hours."</p>
<p>(53:4) Indeed, he bore our illnesses and carried our pains – but we regarded him as diseased, stricken by God and afflicted.</p>	<p>"...he bore our illnesses and carried our pains – but we regarded him as diseased..." This is what Israelites would say talking about how the Servant had suffered for them, despite their disregard</p>

Throughout the centuries of Israel's exile, many nations persecuted the Jews on the pretense that it was God's way of "punishing" the "accursed" Jews for having stubbornly rejected the new religions. In these verses, until the end of the chapter,...

the nations confess how they used the Jewish people as scapegoats, not for the "noble" reasons they had long claimed.

Indeed, the nations selfishly persecuted the Jews as a distraction from their own corrupt regimes: "Surely our suffering he did bear, and our pains he carried..." (53:4)

for him. Why would the kings and nations be talking about how Israel had *borne their illnesses and carried their pains... for millennia*? In what way has Israel done this?

"Throughout the centuries of Israel's exile..." If centuries of persecution had any bearing on the Servant's identity, I would be the first to vote for Israel as the best candidate for the position. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, this is not the Persecution Olympics and Roth's suggestion is irrelevant to the discussion. He is merely repeating conjecture, hoping that doing so often and loud will make it go down as a fact. But circular reasoning is not a fact, regardless of how often it is repeated.

"...the nations confess how they used the Jewish people as scapegoats..." The nations have undeniably used the Jews as scapegoats, but the suggestion is even less connected to the actual text than the previous conjecture.

The reader can decide if the dialogue better fits world rulers saying *Israel bore their illnesses and were used as scapegoats*, or if the narrators are Israelites looking back on the Servant's mission and lamenting their not having fully appreciated him.

(53:5) He was wounded as a result of our transgressions, and crushed as a result of our iniquities. The chastisement upon him was for our benefit; and **through his wounds we were healed**.

"53:5... through his [Israel's] wounds we [the nations] were healed... This verse describes how the humbled world leaders confess that Jewish suffering occurred as a direct result of "our [the gentile nations'] iniquities." Some world rulers have accepted responsibility for Jewish suffering. But how can we make sense out of the part of the text that says: "The chastisement upon him [Israel] was for our [gentile nations] benefit; and through his wounds we were healed?"

According to Roth's view, which is the current Jewish view, it means that Jewish suffering resulted in benefits to the gentile nations. The interpretation gives the

This verse describes how the humbled world leaders confess that Jewish suffering occurred as a direct result of “our iniquities” – i.e., depraved Jew-hatred, rather than, as previously claimed, the stubborn blindness of the Jews.

Isaiah 53:5 is a **classic example of mistranslation**: The verse does not say, “He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed *for* our iniquities,” which could convey the vicarious suffering ascribed to Jesus. Rather, the proper translation is: “He was wounded because of our transgressions, and crushed because *of* our iniquities.” This conveys that the Servant suffered as a result of the sinfulness of others – not the opposite as Christians contend – that the Servant suffered to atone for the sins of others.

impression that God decided that *somebody* had to be punished, and chose the Jews instead of the gentile nations.

Is that reasonable, or does the ancient rabbinic interpretation make more sense; that here we have Israelites who recognize the benefits that accrued from the Servant’s demise?

No explanation is offered as to how millennia of Jewish persecution resulted in the healing of the nations. **“world leaders confess that Jewish suffering occurred as a direct result of ‘our iniquities.’”** The interpretation not only paints God as dispensing justice arbitrarily, but it also contradicts the Bible. God punished Israel because they sinned against him, not because of the sins of the nations.

- **Isaiah 42:24** “Who has given Jacob for pillage and Israel to the plunderers? Is it not Jehovah, the One against whom we sinned?”
- **Isaiah 50:1** “Look! It was because of your own errors you were sold, and because of your own transgressions your mother was sent away.”

“...a classic example of mistranslation.” By definition, a *classic* example is one that exhibits all the features of the *thing* under discussion. So, a classic example is an important example. Let’s see...

Allegedly, the Hebrew really says “because,” but Christians translate “for,” either out of ignorance of Hebrew or willful distortion. Take your pick.

The author hides the fact that some Jewish translations have “for,” and some Christian translations have, “because.”

- **Leeser**: “...wounded *for* our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...”
- **Alter**: “...wounded *for* our crimes, crushed for our transgressions...”

<p>Indeed, the Christian idea directly contradicts the basic Jewish teaching that God promises forgiveness to all who sincerely return to Him; thus there is no need for the Messiah to atone for others (Isaiah 55:6-7, Jeremiah 36:3, Ezekiel chapters 18 and 33, Hoseah 14:1-3, Jonah 3:6-10, Proverbs 16:6, Daniel 4:27, 2-Chronicles 7:14).</p>	<p>In the end, this so-called <i>classic</i> example of “mistranslation and distortion,” is no example whatsoever, classic or otherwise.</p> <p>So, according to Jewish translations, “for” is valid and the text can suggest that the Servant suffered to atone for the sins of others.</p> <p>But the objection is only a distraction. As I mentioned in the analysis of this text in Chapter 1, making an issue of word choice here is pointless since other texts in the passage also indicate that the Servant suffers in place of others (the very definition of <i>vicarious sacrifice</i>.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artscroll: 53:6 “Hashem inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all...” • Alter: 53:8 “...he was cut off... bearing their blight...” • Tanakh-JPS: 53:10 “...the LORD chose to crush him... an offering for guilt...” <p>“...the basic Jewish teaching that God promises forgiveness to all who sincerely return to Him...” Here Roth alleges “contradiction” as he omits the fact that animal sacrifice were necessary for forgiveness in Judaism. This was a daily aspect of Jewish life until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Sacrifices occupied a substantial portion of the Tanakh, something Roth ignores as if it never existed.</p> <p>The Christian idea that sacrifice is required for forgiveness of sins is based on the Tanakh. The Servant’s death in Isaiah is considered a guilt sacrifice for the sins of others and Christians believe that Jesus is the Servant mentioned in the text. There is nothing contradictory in the belief.</p> <p>The question remaining is how Jews can be forgiven without the sacrifices stipulated in the Tanakh?</p>
<p>(53:6) We have all strayed like sheep, each of us turning his own way, and God</p>	

<p>inflicted upon him [Israel] the iniquity of us all.</p> <p>The nations realize that their lack of proper leadership (“shepherd”) caused them to treat the Jews with disdain. They further acknowledge how punishments that should have befallen the nations were averted through Israel’s suffering.</p>	<p>“...punishments that should have befallen the nations were averted through Israel’s suffering.” What is this man talking about?</p> <p>Exactly when and how were the nations’ punishments averted through Israel’s suffering?</p> <p>The gentile nations were punished by God, not healed. They could hardly be the narrators in the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremiah 30:11 “But I will make an extermination among all the <i>nations</i> to which I scattered you.”
<p>(53:7) He was persecuted and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth. Like a sheep being led to the slaughter or a lamb that is silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.</p> <p>In various contexts, the Bible uses the imagery of “sheep led to the slaughter” specifically in reference to the Jewish people. For example: "You give us as sheep to be eaten and have scattered us among the nations... we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalms 44:12, 23).</p> <p>This verse prophesizes the many hardships – both physical torment and economic exploitation – that the Jews endured in exile. Ironically, this prophecy refers in part to the 11th century Crusaders who "persecuted and afflicted" the Jews in the name of Jesus.</p> <p>In our time, while Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were "led to the</p>	<p>“He was persecuted and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth.” According to historian Will Durant, “No people in history has fought so tenaciously for liberty as the Jews.”—Endnote 3.</p> <p>The text describes a pacific individual who courageously bears unjustified persecution and execution.</p> <p>The Orthodox explanation of Israel’s lengthy suffering, repeated by Roth, causes most Jews to simply disconnect, while alienating others.</p> <p>“This verse prophesizes the many hardships... the Jews endured in exile. Ironically, this prophecy refers in part to the 11th century Crusaders who ‘persecuted and afflicted’ the Jews in the name of Jesus.” At the point, the authors unsupported and unjustified narrative raises serious questions regarding God’s justice.</p> <p>PAUSE: This one deserves a minute. Roth is actually saying that Psalm 44:12, 23 is a prophecy about Jewish persecution at the hands of Crusaders. Does this mean that God knew the Jews would not repent by the 11th Century? Did God plan this some two thousand years in advance?</p> <p>“In our time, while Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were ‘led to the</p>

<p>slaughter," they still remained like a "lamb that is silent before her shearers" – without complaints against God.</p>	<p>slaughter,' they still remained like a 'lamb that is silent before her shearers' – without complaints against God."</p> <p>The comment is deeply troubling. Roth goes into more detail on this in verse 10.</p>
<p>(53:8) He was released from captivity and judgment; who could have imagined such a generation? For he was <u>removed from the land of the living</u>; because of my people's sin they were afflicted.</p> <p>The phrase, "land of the living" (<i>Eretz HaChaim</i>) refers specifically to the Land of Israel.</p> <p>Thus this verse, "He was removed from the land of the living," does not mean that the servant was killed, but rather was exiled from the Land of Israel.</p> <p>This verse again describes the world's surprise at witnessing the Jewish return to the Promised Land. "Who could have imagined" that the nation we tortured now prospers?</p> <p>World leaders offer a stunning confession: "Because of my people's sin, they [the Jews] were afflicted."</p> <p>Here the text makes absolutely clear that the oppressed Servant is a collective nation, not a single individual. This is where knowledge of biblical Hebrew is absolutely crucial. At the end of the verse, the Hebrew word for "they were" (<i>lamoh – in?</i>) always refers to a group, never to an individual. (see for example, Psalms 99:7).</p>	<p>"...<i>removed from the land of the living...</i>" "this verse... does not mean that the servant was killed, but rather was exiled from the Land of Israel." The fact that Jewish scholars and translations contradict the author's statement.</p> <p>"the land of the living... refers specifically to the Land of Israel." Roth's translation (whatever it may be) and his comments, are crafted to support the interpretation that the Servant (Israel) was exiled. This obviates the need to answer the objection that the Servant is killed but Israel, as a nation, survived.</p> <p>"...<i>removed from the land...</i>" The correct translation of the Hebrew is, "cut off." The term generally refers to an execution and not to being "removed/exiled."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exodus 31:14 "Those who desecrate it [the Sabbath] shall be <i>put to death</i>, for whoever performs work on it, that soul will be <i>cut off</i> [as in Isaiah 53:8] from the midst of its people."—<i>Chabad</i>. <p>"...<i>my people's sin...</i>" The kings would not say "my people." First, because it is a biblical expression, and also because the nations are not united by culture, race and religion. Israelites would certainly use the term.</p> <p>"This is where knowledge of biblical Hebrew is absolutely crucial. At the end of the verse, the Hebrew word for 'they were' (<i>lamoh – in?</i>) <u>always refers to a group, never to an individual.</u>"</p> <p>Roth's comment betrays a lack knowledge both of Hebrew as well as Jewish translations that contradict his statement.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leeser: "...the plague was laid on <u>him</u>..." • Alter: "...<u>he</u> was cut off... bearing their blight." • Tanakh-JPS: "...<u>he</u> was cut off... through the sin of my people, who deserved the judgment." <p>Is Roth really unaware of these translations or does he believe that the Jewish translators do not know Hebrew?</p>
<p>(53:9) He submitted his grave to evil people; and the wealthy submitted to his executions, for committing no crime, and with no deceit in his mouth.</p> <p>Missionaries cite this verse as a claim that Jesus lived a sinless life, and was thus the Messiah. This is contradicted, however, by the Gospels themselves, who record that Jesus sinned by violating the Sabbath (John 9:16) and – by claiming to be God Himself – violating the grave prohibition against making any physical image of God</p> <p>Throughout history, Jews were given the choice to "convert or die." Yet as this verse describes, there was "no deceit in his mouth" – the loyal Jews refused to accept a pagan deity as their God. Rather than profane God's Holy Name, they "submitted to the grave" – i.e. chose to die rather than renounce their faith. As such these Jews were often denied proper burial, discarded "to the grave as evil people."</p> <p>Further, wealthy Jews "submitted to his executions, for committing no crime" – killed so that wicked conquerors could confiscate their riches.</p>	<p>"...his executions..." The Hebrew literally says, "deaths." "Executions," is commentary, not translation. (This is explained further in the analysis of Isaiah 52/53, in Chapter 1.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leeser: "...with the godless rich at his death..." • Alter: "...and with evildoers his death." • Tanakh-JPS: "...and with the rich in his death." <p>"the Gospels themselves... record that Jesus sinned by violating the Sabbath (John 9:16)." The objection has the obvious purpose of distraction.</p> <p>Context is omitted. (See John 9:13-16.) The Pharisees <i>accused</i> Jesus of violating the Sabbath because he disregarded the Pharisees' definition of "work" when he cured a blind man. There was no <i>biblical</i> law against what Jesus did. But the Pharisees viewed their traditions as being on par with God's Law. (Exodus 20:9, 10) They even plotted to kill Jesus, on a different occasion, because he had healed a man on the Sabbath.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John 9:15, 16 "So this time the Pharisees also began asking the man how he gained sight. He said to them: 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' 16 Some of the Pharisees then began to say: 'This is not a man from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.'" <p>"the Gospels... record that Jesus sinned by... claiming to be God." (John 10:33, 14:9-10) As above. Instead of offering evidence that the narrators are</p>

	<p>kings/nations, the author focuses on discrediting Jesus as the Servant. Even if Jesus were not the Servant, it would not mean that Israel was, or that the narrators are the kings/nations. It's called misdirection.</p> <p>But, to answer the objection: Jesus never claimed to be God and Roth omits mentioning Jesus' refutation of the accusation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John 10:36 "...do you say to me whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, 'I am God's Son?'" <p>Regardless of the interpretation given to this and other passages, two things are clear: 1) the account does not say "Jesus sinned," and 2) Jesus did not say "I am God."</p> <p>The Sanhedrin never accused Jesus of claiming to be God. And to Pilate, they accused him of saying he was "God's son."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John 19:7 "The Jews answered him: 'We have a law, and according to the law he ought to die, because he made himself God's son.'"
<p>(53:10) God desired to oppress him and He afflicted him. If his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring and live long days, and God's purpose would succeed in his hand.</p> <p>"God desired to oppress" the Jewish people, in order to inspire them to</p>	<p>"If his soul would <u>acknowledge guilt</u>."</p> <p>Roth's translation perverts the text and contradicts the previous verse: "[the servant] had done no wrong... there was no deception in his mouth. The Servant is innocent, without necessity of acknowledging guilt.</p> <p>Other translations render the verse correctly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leeser: "...when now his soul hath brought the trespass-offering..." • Chabad: "...if his soul makes itself restitution..." • Alter: "Would he lay down a guilt offering..." • JSB: "If he made himself an offering for guilt..." <p>"God desired to oppress the Jewish people, in order to <u>inspire</u> them to</p>

return to Torah observance. If the Jews would only "acknowledge guilt," they would see their "offspring and live long days." This refers to the Messianic era when all Jews will return to Torah observance. This verse emphasizes that the Servant is to be rewarded with long life and many children. This verse could not possibly refer to Jesus who, according to the New Testament, died young and childless.

(Furthermore, **if Jesus was alleged to be the immortal Son of God**, it is absurd to apply the concept of "living long days.")

Although missionaries may claim that the "offspring" refers to spiritual descendants, this is based on a **distortion and mistranslation**.

In this verse, the Hebrew word for **"offspring" (zera - זֶרַע)** always refers to **physical descendants** (see Genesis 12:7, 15:2-4, 15:13, 46:6; Exodus 28:43). A different word, *banim* (בָּנִים), generally translated as "sons," is used to refer to spiritual descendants (see De 14:1).

(53:11) He would see the purpose and be satisfied with his soul's distress. With his knowledge **My servant will cause the masses to be righteous**; and he will bear their sins.

Missionaries cite this verse to claim that Jesus died for our sins. The Christian idea of one's sins being forgiven through the suffering of another person goes against **the basic biblical teaching that each individual has to atone for his own sins by repenting**. (Exodus 32:32-33, De 24:16, Ezekiel 18:1-4)

return to Torah." Roth is actually saying that millenniums of oppression have been God's way of *inspiring* the Jews to return to Torah. The *oppression* he mentions includes the Holocaust which cost the lives of six million Jews – including 1.5 million children! (Is he really saying what I think he's saying?)

"the immortal Son of God." Again, this is just distraction without relevance to the question of whether the Servant is the nation of Israel or an individual.

But, addressing the objection: Had Jesus been immortal while on earth he would not have died when they executed him, and he would not have needed to be resurrected by God.

"distortion and mistranslation." No comment.

"(zera - זֶרַע) always refers to physical descendants." The statement is incorrect, see Genesis 3:15.

"My servant will cause the masses to be righteous..." The translation is designed to support the idea that the Servant, Israel, will lead the world to a righteous standing before God. Jewish translations are different.

- **Alter:** "My Servant shall put the righteous in the right for *many*, and their crimes he shall bear."
- **Leeser:** "...through his knowledge shall my righteous servant bring the *many* to righteousness, while he will bear their iniquities."
- **Tanakh-JPS:** "My righteous servant makes the *many* righteous, it is their punishment that he bears."

"the basic biblical teaching that each individual has to atone for his own sins..." The reference is to "vicarious sacrifice." In ancient Israel, atonement was granted through offering a sacrifice, never for repentance alone. Ever since the

<p>This verse describes how God's Servant "will cause the masses to be righteous" – not as some mistranslate, "he will justify the many." The Jewish mission is to serve as a "light to the nations," leading the world to righteousness through knowledge of the one true God. The Jews will accomplish this both by example (De 4:5-8; Zechariah 8:23) and by instructing the nations in God's Law (Isaiah 2:3-4; Micah 4:2-3). As it says: "The world will become full of the knowledge of God, as water covers the sea." (Isaiah 11:9).</p>	<p>destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, sacrifice for sins were no longer available. How then can those under the Law be granted atonement for sins?</p> <p>"The Jewish mission is to serve as a 'light to the nations,' leading the world to righteousness through knowledge of the one true God." The anonymous <i>Servant</i> was tasked with being a "light to the nations," not Israel (see Addendum 5).</p> <p>Aside from what the text actually says, has Israel fulfilled the role of being "a light to the nations?"</p>
<p>(12) Therefore, I will assign him a portion in public and he will divide the mighty as spoils – in return for having poured out his soul for death and being counted among the wicked, for he bore the sin of the many, and prayed for the wicked.</p> <p>This verse speaks of how the Jews always pray for the welfare of the nations they are exiled into (see Jeremiah 29:7). The verse continues to explain that the Jewish people, who righteously bore the sins of the world and yet remained faithful to God, will be rewarded.</p> <p>Regarding the above passage, some have claimed that the "suffering servant" cannot be Israel, since Israel has sins. Yet this is a fallacy, since we know that no human being – not even Moses – is completely free of sin. Yet Moses was considered "righteous," which takes into account not only one's good deeds, but also one's repentance after sin. If Jesus is God, these ideas have no meaning.</p>	<p>"poured out his soul <u>for</u> death." I do not know what the phrase "<i>for</i> death" means. In any case, the Servant dies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leeser: "...he poured out his soul <i>unto</i> death..." • Chabad: "...poured out his soul <i>to</i> death..." <p>"<u>prayed</u> for the wicked." Roth does not call <i>mistranslation and distortion</i> here, but I do; the word "prayer" is not in the Hebrew and the author's comment, based on the mistranslation he's using, is an unjustified interpretation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alter: "...bore the offence of many and <i>interceded</i> for the wrongdoers..." • Tanakh-JPS: "...bore the guilt of the many and made <i>intercession</i> for sinners." • Chabad: "...bore the sin of many and <i>interceded</i> for the transgressors." <p>"some have claimed that the "suffering servant" cannot be Israel, since Israel has sins... not even Moses is completely free of sin."</p> <p>Comparing Israel to Moses is a stretch.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaiah 59:2-8 "For your [Israel's] hands were defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken falsehood, your tongue mutters injustice... 4 trusting in vanity and speaking lies, conceiving injustice and begetting wickedness... 7 Their feet

Immediately following this promise of reward for the Jews' suffering (53:10-12),...

chapter 54 clearly speaks of the redemption which awaits the Jewish people. This point is acknowledged by all Christian commentaries.

run to evil, and they hasten to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of wickedness; robbery and ruin are in their paths. 8 The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever goes on it knows no peace.”—*Chabad*.

“...following this promise of reward for the Jews' suffering...” This is a repetition of unproven supposition offered up as fact.

“...chapter 54 clearly speaks of the redemption which awaits the Jewish people... acknowledged by all Christian commentaries.” There are two parts to the allegation: First, that chapter 54 “clearly speaks” of Jewish redemption in the Messianic Age, and 2) That all Christian commentaries agree with this view. Neither statement is true.

The *JSB* relates Isaiah 54:1-17, to the Israel's liberation from Babylon, “This passage assures her [Zion]... that God remains her husband and protector and that she will soon have abundant children; in other words, the exiles will soon return to Judah.”

Rather than follow Roth's explanation, Christian commentaries follow the Apostle Paul who quotes from Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians 4:26, 27, and applies it to the Christian congregation.

Here is one example of the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 54.⁹³

“[Israel's] exile in Babylon was like a period of divorce when God separated her from him because of her sins... She is now to return to God and to her homeland, where she will produce greater increase than in the days before the captivity... Thus, the metaphor of enlarging the dwelling places and of ‘spreading abroad’ in all directions is a reference to the great growth and prosperity of the Christian faith.”

	<p>Christian commentaries see the prophecy of Israel's release from Babylonian captivity, and Israel's later prosperity, as a metaphor of the prosperity of the Christian faith.</p> <p>What exactly is Roth referring to when he says, that "<i>all</i> Christian commentaries" acknowledge that chapter 54 speaks of the redemption of the Jewish people? I read fifteen commentaries and could not find any that back up his statement.</p>
<p>Conclusion: In the days of Jesus, nobody ever understood Isaiah 53 to be predicting the death of the Messiah.</p>	<p><u>"nobody ever understood Isaiah 53 to be predicting the death of the Messiah."</u> Probably most religious authorities in the 1st Century understood Isaiah 53 to be predicting the death of the Messiah. Roth would have been correct if he had said: "Nobody in the days of Jesus understood Isaiah 53 as referring to Israel." (See Addendum 1, <i>1800 Years of Jewish Interpretation Identifying the Servant as an Individual.</i>)</p> <p>Jewish sources that saw Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as referring to the Messiah.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targum Jonathon: 52:13 "Behold my servant <i>Messiah</i> shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase, and be exceeding strong." • Ruth Rabbah 5: "Alternatively, it is referring to the messianic king... as it is stated: "He was pained by our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5)." • Midrash Tanchuma Toldot 14: "A song of ascents. I will lift up mine eyes to the mountains (Ps. 121:1)... This verse refers to the Messiah, the descendant of David. Why was he called a <i>great mountain</i>? Because he will be greater than the patriarchs, as is said: <i>Behold, My servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high</i> (Isa. 52:13)." (From 500 to 800 CE, but reflecting an earlier tradition.) <p>Jesus himself referred to Isaiah 52/53 several times in predicting his own death (compare Matthew 20:28 with Isaiah</p>

<p>When Jesus said, "I am going to Jerusalem where I will suffer and die," the Apostle Peter did not relate this in any way to the suffering described in Isaiah 53. Rather, Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, "Be it far from you Lord, this shall not be unto you." In other words, "God forbid – that cannot happen to you!" Peter never expected the Messiah to be tortured and killed (see Matthew 16:21-22).</p>	<p>53:11; Luke 9:22 with Isaiah 53:5; Luke 18:31-33 with Isaiah 53:5, 7). In Lu 22:37 Jesus quotes directly from Isaiah 53:12, "For I tell you that what is written must be accomplished in me, namely, 'He was counted with lawless ones.' For this is being fulfilled concerning me."</p> <p>Less than two months after Jesus' execution, Peter quoted Isaiah 52:13, "...the God of our forefathers, has <i>glorified</i> his Servant, Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned before Pilate." (Acts 3:13, 26)</p> <p>Shortly thereafter (1-3 years?), a Jewish proselyte asked Phillip, a Christian, to explain Isaiah 53:7, 8, which speaks of the Servant's death. After Philip explained how the entire passage related to Jesus, the proselyte got baptized. (Acts 8:30-36) The proselyte's question – "...about whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about some other man?" – shows he had previously understood that the Servant was an individual, and readily accepted that it referred to the Messiah.</p> <p>The death of the Servant/Messiah in Isaiah 52/53 was a prominent feature of the Christian message from the outset. It is also evident that Jews in general, and many of the priestly class, understood Isaiah 52/53 as a reference to the Servant/Messiah's death. (See <i>References to Isaiah 52/53 Were Added to the Christian Scriptures Much Later</i>, Chapter 3.)</p> <p>"Peter did not relate this in any way to the suffering described in Isaiah 53... never expected the Messiah to be tortured and killed." This is not correct. It's no secret that the apostles failed to understand a lot of things at first. For example, after Jesus tells them he would be killed (a reference to Isaiah 53:5) and resurrected, Luke 18:34 says, "However, they did not get the meaning of any of these things, for these words were hidden from them, and they did not understand the things said."</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>Mental fog is not uncommon for those in the middle of an historical watershed moment. Think of the lack of understanding the Israelites displayed when they induced Aaron to make a golden calf because Moses was gone longer than expected. (Exodus 32:1-4) Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, along with 70 “distinguished” elders had only recently seen a vision of God! (Exodus 24:9-11) And all of this after the Israelites had seen 10 plagues, miraculously crossed the Red Sea, and witnessed the annihilation of Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian army at God’s hand.</p> <p>Jesus’ disciples may not have been quick to discern the full significance of all that was happening around them, but they weren’t as slow as Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, the 70 “distinguished” elders, and the rest of the nation of Israel centuries earlier.</p>
<p>Interestingly, the 20th century Christian <i>New English Bible – Oxford Study Edition</i> (annotation on Isaiah 52:13-53:12) clearly identifies the Suffering Servant as the nation of Israel which “has suffered as a humiliated individual.”</p>	<p>“<i>New English Bible – Oxford Study Edition</i> (annotation on Isaiah 52:13-53:12) clearly identifies the Suffering Servant as the nation of Israel.” In contrast to the above, the <i>Jewish Encyclopaedia</i> (article <i>Servant of God</i>: Special usage in Isaiah), mentioned previously, comments, “The descriptions in... [Isaiah 42:1-4, 44:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12] of the attitude and conduct of the ‘ebed Yhwh seem to be idealizations of the character of an individual rather than of the whole of Israel. Especially is this true of Isa. 52:13-53:12, the exaltation of the ‘man of suffering.’ In this a prophetic anticipatory picture of the Messiah has been recognized by both Jewish and Christian tradition.”</p> <p>Scholarly views should be appreciated but not accepted as conclusive unless they are accompanied by solid evidence.</p>
<p>If the context of Isaiah 53 so clearly refers to the Jewish people, how could so many Christian leaders have mistranslated the Bible? History shows that – for whatever motivation – many did so knowingly:</p>	<p>“If the context of Isaiah 53 so clearly refers to the Jewish people, how could so many Christian leaders have <u>mistranslated</u> the Bible... <u>knowingly</u>?”</p> <p>Roth states his allegations as if they had been litigated and proven in a court of law.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lucius Coelius Firmianes Lactantius, 3rd century Church leader: "Among those who seek power and gain from their religion, there will never be wanting an inclination to forge and lie for it." • St. Gregory, 4th century Bishop of Nanzanzus: "A little jargon is all that is necessary to impose on the people. The less they comprehend, the more they admire. Our forefathers and doctors have often said not what they thought, but what circumstances and necessity dictated." • Dr. Herbert Marsh, 19th century English Bishop: "It is a certain fact that several readings in our common printed text are nothing more than alterations made by Origen..." • Walter Brueggemann Ph.D., an ordained minister and author of 60 books on the Bible, writes: "[A]lthough it is clear that this poetry does not have Jesus in any first instance on its horizon, it is equally clear that the church, from the outset, has found the poetry a poignant and generative way to consider Jesus, wherein humiliation equals crucifixion and exaltation equals resurrection and ascension." 	<p>To the contrary, every single one of his allegations has been shown to be baseless.</p> <p>Here he lists four quotations that ostensibly admit Christians have <i>knowingly</i> mistranslated Isaiah 53. A close examination reveals that only the last quote <i>seems</i> to refer to Isaiah 53 (no source is cited, making it difficult to check). My comments above, in reference to the quotation from the <i>Oxford Study Edition</i>, also apply here.</p> <p>I do not disagree that Christian translators may have been guilty of knowingly mistranslated Scripture. Even so, in relation to Isaiah 52/53, not one of Roth's claims of <i>mistranslation</i> and <i>distortion</i> has panned out. Every accusation has been gratuitous.</p> <p>Surprisingly, rabbis were pioneers in the time honored field of mistranslation. (See <i>Christians Tampered with the Septuagint to Favor Their Doctrines</i>, Chapter 3, and Endnote 79.)</p>
<p>Why It Matters: When all the verses have been parsed, and all the proofs have been presented, one still might wonder: What difference does it make who is right?</p> <p>The theological gap between Judaism and Christianity is not limited to the question: "Who is the Messiah," or a debate over the translation of a few biblical verses. Judaism and Christianity are two different belief systems, differing over core issues such as the existential nature of man, the role of our relationship with God, and the path to genuine spiritual fulfillment.</p>	<p>"Why It Matters... Judaism and Christianity... are two different belief systems, differing over core issues such as the existential nature of man, the role of our relationship with God, and the path to genuine spiritual fulfillment." Roth's comment is sober, cogent, and hits at the heart of a <i>core issue</i> affecting "our relationship with God"; the identification of Israel as the Servant in Isaiah 52/53. This interpretation informs – distorts, I should say – one's view of God and consequently the relationship with him. This is a serious accusation that needs explaining.</p> <p>According to the present day Jewish view, "God desired to oppress the Jewish people [his Servant] in order to inspire them to return to Torah observance." The interpretation has two inseparable parts; 1)</p>

Israel is the Servant, 2) God has given Israel over to the nations to be pummeled until they return to Tora.

To say, “God *predicts* the long and difficult exile of the Jewish people [in Isaiah],” means that God *foresaw* 2500+ years of Jewish suffering – Crusades, expulsions, pogroms and the Holocaust – “in order to *inspire* them [his chosen people] to return to Torah observance.”

This suggestion, that Jewish suffering for more than two and a half millennia has been God’s method of *inspiring* his people to serve and love him, is absurd on its face. No one can be beaten into serving another out of love. And if that was God’s chosen method, it hasn’t worked; Israel still hasn’t returned to Torah observance.

Though Judaism and Christianity differ over core issues, as Roth says, on this issue – the nature of God as expressed in the manner he deals with his people – *Biblical* Judaism is at odds with *Rabbinic* Judaism. (See Endnotes 56 and 64.) Rabbinic Judaism’s portrayal of God is very different to the Tanakh’s: “I [God] have drawn you to me with loyal love.” (Jeremiah 31:3) Loyal love is the polar opposite of abandonment that results in indescribable harm; the very essence of the Rabbinic interpretation.

The Rabbinic view perverts the Tanakh by portraying God as cold, cruel, legalistic and indifferent to Jewish suffering. The potential negative impact on an individual’s relationship with God is undeniable; many have become enraged with God because of it. Rabbinic Judaism’s interpretation has had a deep and lasting effect on countless individuals.

The Tanakh does not say that “God trains his chosen people through *millenniums* of suffering.” God forbid!

- **Exodus 34:6, 7** “And the Lord passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed: ‘Lord, Lord, *benevolent* God, Who is

compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and truth preserving loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet He does not completely clear [of sin] *He visits the iniquity* of parents on children and children's children, *to the third and fourth generations.*”

- Rashi comments on the expression, “fourth generation”: “[God’s] attribute of goodness exceeds the attribute of retribution by a ratio of one to five hundred.”
- **Deuteronomy 8:5** “You shall know in your heart, that *just as a man chastises his son*, so does the Lord, *your God, chastise you.*”
- **Jeremiah 30:11** “I will *discipline you to the proper degree*, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.”

The *proper degree of discipline* is explicitly stated.

- **Jeremiah 29:10** “For so said the Lord: ‘For at the completion of *seventy years of Babylon* I will remember you, and I will fulfill My good word toward you, to restore you to this place [Jerusalem].’”

“The proper degree” was 70 years of Babylonian exile, not 2500+ years of indescribable suffering *beginning* with Israel’s exile in Babylon.

Jeremiah’s prophecy of 70 years of exile was fulfilled in 537 BCE when Cyrus decreed that the Jews were free to return to Jerusalem. This is an historic fact. (See Jeremiah 25:11, 12; Daniel 9:2; Ezra 1:1-3.)

Both the Tanakh (Biblical Judaism) and the Christian Scriptures portray God in the same way, as the following texts show:

- **Proverbs 3:11, 12** “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hebrews 12:5-7 "...have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son' 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Paul is quoting here from the <i>LXX</i>, so the wording of Proverbs is slightly different in the <i>MT</i>. <p>The writer of Hebrews appealed to Christian believers in the same way the writer of Proverbs had appealed to Jewish believers; to view God's discipline like a father's discipline. The example is based on a relationship that virtually everyone can, and should, relate to.</p> <p>A father who would discipline his children in imitation of the Rabbinic description of God, would be arrested and lose custody of his children.</p> <p>In summary, the Rabbinic portrayal of God is just as irreconcilable with the Tanakh as it is with the Christian Scriptures.</p> <p>(Readers who have gotten the impression that I do not warm to the idea that God desired to <i>inspire</i> his chosen people to return to Torah through millenniums of the worst suffering imaginable, might be on to something.)</p>
<p>Jews have held steadfast to their beliefs for thousands of years, amidst all forms of persecution and hardship. They have done so in the belief that the Jewish people – as bearers of God's message of morality and justice – have a unique and crucial role to play in human history. As the prophet Isaiah predicts, this will become eminently clear when the Messiah, the King of Israel, arrives. May it be speedily in our day.</p>	<p>"the Jewish people - bearers of God's message of morality and justice."</p> <p>The statement defies reason.</p>

A FINAL WORD: Those reading the Servant passage in Isaiah for the first time and without previous coaching, Jew or non-Jew, intuitively understand they are reading about a righteous individual who gives his life for others. From there, to link the passage to Jesus, is a natural step. If this were not the case, the rabbis would not have changed their interpretation of the Servant in the Middle Ages (when the Jews were being severely persecuted), today's anti-missionary groups would not be investing so much effort into countering the view that the Servant is an individual nor would they employ the type of ad hominem attacks, false accusations, and blatant dishonesty, as seen in Roth's article. Mostly it's the gratuitous accusations and vitriol that betray their lack of credibility.

Finally, none of Roth's allegations against the Christian translations are justified, not a single one. On the other hand, in some four cases, the translation Roth uses was mistranslated. Not that Christians are incapable of *mistranslation and distortion*. This depends on the translator, and his or her level of bias and emotional investment regarding the passage, the doctrine or idea it represents, and the strength of their commitment to unbiased translating... "Kabdehu ve hashdehu!"

When we first suggested to Yakov that we review Roth's article together, he said it was a good idea since it mirrors many of his own thoughts. However, when we got down to brass tacks and he saw how our analysis dismantled the article, his enthusiasm evaporated. He tried to change the topic, but we persevered, pointed out that we had all agreed to go over the article and we suggested he see the analysis through to the end.

He was visibly affected by the end of the consideration. He said (with a touch of bitterness), "So you think that by showing some Jewish translations that coincide with the Christian ones you prove that Jesus is the Messiah?" "Of course not," we replied, "the Jewish translations only *prove* that Roth's accusations of Christian *distortion* and *mistranslation* are unfounded, and the translation he was using, as well as his statements, are open to the very accusations he levies against others. Since Roth has not been honest, he is a tainted source, and it would be wise to be wary of him, as well as others in his league. By extension, Aish.com also comes off looking bad because they host Roth's article. As a regular contributor to Aish.com (11 articles), one would expect more from him... Aish should expect more from him. In other words: Why suspect only the Christians when it is healthier to suspect them all?"

At that, Yakov did a complete turnaround: "Who is Roth anyway? Just some guy who wrote an article." He said the analysis of Roth's article proved nothing, and reviewing it was unnecessary. He even indicated that we had blindsided him with the article. So I had to send him our WhatsApp notes to prove that was not the case.⁹⁴

∞ ∞ ∞

Our WhatsApp chat after the above videoconference discussion:

Yakov: I asked you 15 questions why Isaiah 53 cannot be about Jesus and supported them with passages from Tanakh - You picked an article by Roth and went through the mistakes he made rather than focus on the bigger issues we have with Isaiah 53.

NOTE: All of Yakov's questions, more than 50, are covered in Chapter 1, *A Verse-by-Verse Consideration of Isaiah 52:13-53:12*. I explained my reasons to him for first examining Roth's article in my answer below.

Answer: You approved going over Roth's article. You said you shared his views, said you would look into it further. His statements on the "mistranslations and deceptions" of Christian translations were the same as yours. Seeing that his conclusions were wrong, especially on points of Hebrew translation into English, should have helped you to see that your conclusions were also wrong. Not sure you appreciate that. Seeing we have been wrong on points we held quite firmly is uncomfortable. But we should be grateful we have been helped to see an error, rather than angry... I thought that showing Roth's fallacies in matters in which you agreed with him would be easier for you to take. I may have been wrong on that score.

Yakov: I asked you why the Greek text mistranslates a word incorrectly - You point me to some Jewish version and tell me "He [the translator] did it not you, go figure out why he did."

Answer: The point of the Jewish translations in English was to help you see that relying on 1 translation only and then accusing the Christian translators of changing God's word, is not sound research. Not sure if the point was fully appreciated. I did refuse to tell you why the Jewish translators translate *lammo* as singular because you should want to spend the energy to make sure you're accurate before accusing others... of deception. Hasty finger pointing is unkind and reveals a prejudicial disposition.

Yakov: You're accusing me of being biased with the Jews and critical of Christians - No I am not. I am with anyone who teaches what Tanakh says.

Answer: Well, yes, I do believe you're biased, that's not an accusation, it's my opinion. It's the opinion of someone who sincerely appreciates and values you. "Should the righteous one strike me, it would be an act of loyal love; Should he reprove me, it would be like oil on my head, Which my head would never refuse. (Ps 141:5) I gave you my sincere opinion, but of course, I could be wrong.

Your presentation of matters Yakov, sounds like the guy who said: "There are only 2 ways of viewing this issue, mine and the view of those who haven't heard me yet."

And you also seem a little annoyed, and more combative than curious. Of course, we are texting and that may give the wrong opinion. But I have to ask, are you really interested, honestly curious, in hearing and trying to understand my side? If so, I'll continue and relate to your texts and comments. If not, let me know. So, take your time and think it through. If this issue is like your point of view on Isaiah 7:14, there is little to gain from continuing to talk about it.

NOTE: I offered Yakov an opportunity to end the discussions, and in all honesty, I was hoping he would accept it, but he didn't. We pressed on, but our communication from this point was limited to emails and WhatsApp chats.

∞ ∞ ∞

4. THE CONTRASTING CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL AND THE SERVANT

The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (quoted in Addendum 3) says, "perhaps the 'national' interpretation is not admissible in... Isaiah 42:1-4, 44:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12." This is because the description of the Servant in these passages is more characteristic of an individual than of Israel as a whole.

The following table highlights the differences and helps clarify that the unnamed Servant is an individual and not collective Israel. The qualities attributed to the unnamed Servant in the left column are in stark contrast to those attributed to Israel in the right column. Two different entities are being described even though both are referred to as *My Servant*.

SERVANT/MESSIAH	SERVANT/ISRAEL
<p>Summary of the unnamed Servant's defining characteristics in Isaiah chapter 42, 49, 50.</p> <p>The Servant...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promulgates justice among the nations, • Is kind and considerate of the weak and oppressed, • Executes truth in justice, • Establishes justice in the land, • Will be a light to the nations, • Will be despised by Israel, • Opens Israel's blind eyes and deaf ears, • Releases Israel from prison, • Brings back Jacob/Israel, • Makes God's salvation reach every part of the earth, • Will be killed even though he is free from guilt, • Is never deceptive, • Brings a righteous standing to many people. 	<p>Summary of Israel's defining characteristics in various chapters of Isaiah.</p> <p>My Servant Israel...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the blindest and deafest there is, • Doesn't see and hear what it should, • Is plundered and pillaged because of their sins, • Has sinned against Jehovah, • Grew weary of God even though they were supposed to declare his praise, • Burdened God with their sins, wearied him with their errors, • Swore by his name, but not in truth and righteousness, • Was sold and sent away because of their own errors.
<p>Isaiah 42:1-6, 16, 23 "Behold My servant... he shall promulgate justice to the nations... 3 A breaking reed he shall not break; and a flickering flaxen wick he shall not quench... 3 with truth shall he execute justice. 4 Neither shall he weaken nor shall he be broken, until he establishes justice in the land, and for his instruction, islands shall long... I called you a people's *covenant, for a light to nations. 7 For you to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoner out of the dungeon and those sitting in darkness out of the prison... 16 I will lead the blind...I will turn the darkness before them into light... 23 Who among you will hear this? <u>Who will pay attention and listen for the time to come?</u>"— Compare 50:10.</p>	<p>Isaiah 42:18-25 "Listen, you who are deaf; Look and see, you who are blind. 19 Who is blind except my servant, so deaf as the messenger I send? Who is so blind as the... servant of Jehovah?... 20 you do not keep watch. You open your ears, but you do not listen... 22 But this is a people plundered and pillaged; hidden in the prisons... 24 Who has given Jacob for pillage and Israel to the plunderers? Is it not Jehovah, the One against whom we sinned?" (Compare 2 Chron 36:14-16; 23-25 plundered and pillaged.)</p> <p>Yakov: Remember, Israel was chosen as the light to the nations and priests for the nations.</p>

<p>NOTE: The Servant would lead Israel out of darkness. Israel could not be a light to the nations because it was blind, deaf, in darkness and in prison, as in 42:16-25.</p> <p><i>*Covenant/Pledge:</i> The verse does <i>not</i> say that “Israel is God’s covenant people,” rather that the <i>Servant</i> is a covenant/pledge, “of/for” peoples.</p> <p>Bringing the Servant back to life after he suffered death as a guilt-offering (Isaiah 53:12), would be an assurance that the Servant would continue as “a light of the nations,” liberating those in spiritual darkness.</p>	<p>Answer: The unnamed “Servant,” is the “light to the nations” in 42:6 and 49:6, not Israel.</p> <p>NOTE: In contrast to the Servant assigned to “open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoner out of the dungeon,” Israel is “deaf and blind,” abandoned by God to be <i>plundered, pillaged and hidden in prisons</i> because of gross sin.—Isaiah 49:19-25.</p>
<p>Isaiah 49:1-9 “And now, the Lord, who formed me from the womb as a servant to Him, said to bring Jacob back to Him, and Israel shall be gathered to Him... 6 And He said, ‘It is too light for you to be My servant, to establish the tribes of Jacob... but I will make you a light of nations, so that My salvation shall be until the end of the earth.’ 7 This is what Jehovah... says to the one who is despised, to the one who is detested by the nation, to the servant of rulers... The Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you... 9 To say to the prisoners, ‘Come out’ and to those in the darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’”</p> <p>NOTE: The “Servant” in Isaiah 49:1-9, referred to as “a light to the nations,” cannot be Israel because this Servant is assigned “to bring Jacob [Israel] back” to God.</p>	<p>Isaiah 43:8, 10-28 “Now this is what Jehovah says, Your Creator, O Jacob... Bring out a people who are blind... And who are deaf, though they have ears... 10 ‘You are... my servant whom I have chosen... 21 so that they might declare my praise... 22 [But] you grew weary of me, O Israel... 24 Instead, you have burdened me with your sins and made me weary with your errors.’”</p> <p>NOTE: The difference between the unnamed Servant and Israel is stark, especially in view of passages that describe Israel as blind, deaf and disobedient.—Isaiah 42:16, 18, 19; 43:8, 10.</p>
<p>Is 50:9, 10 “Who will pronounce me guilty? 10 Who among you fears Jehovah and listens to the voice of his servant? Who has walked in deep darkness, without any brightness? Let him trust in the name of Jehovah and support himself on his God.”</p> <p>NOTE: The Servant is totally innocent.</p>	<p>Is 48:1, 20 “Hear this O house of Jacob... You who swear by the name of Jehovah... Though not in truth and righteousness... say: ‘Jehovah has redeemed His servant Jacob.’”</p> <p>NOTE: Israel swears falsely in God’s name, a violation of the 3rd commandment.—Exodus 20:7.</p>
<p>Is 53:9, 11 “...he had done no wrong and there was no deception in his mouth... 11 the righteous one, my</p>	<p>Is 50:1 “Look! It was because of your own errors you were sold, and because of</p>

Servant, will bring a righteous standing to many people.”	your own transgressions your mother was sent away.”
-----------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------

∞ ∞ ∞

5. A COMPARISON OF THREE OF THE SERVANT SONGS

Jewish outreach sources claim that when the Servant goes unnamed in Isaiah, the term *always* refers to Israel. They point out that Israel is referred to as God’s Servant 9 times beginning with Isaiah 41, as well as in two of the four Servant Songs. However, they are only telling part of the story.

Actually, there are 5 individuals (including collective Israel and someone who goes unnamed) called “my servant” in Isaiah: The first is “*Isaiah* my servant” (20:3), and the last is the anonymous Servant in 53:11. The anonymous Servant is mentioned 5 times, 4 of those being *after* the final mention of Israel as “my servant,” in 49:3. Seeing the whole picture, along with the fact that Israel is always clearly identified when referred to as “my servant,” disqualifies the Orthodox assertion that the anonymous Servant in Isaiah 52/53 is Israel.

At the outset of our conversations Yakov commented, “There are four “servant songs” in Isaiah that refer to Israel/Isaiah; Isaiah 42, 49, 50 and 53. Logically, if the first three are about Israel and Isaiah, couldn’t the fourth also be about Israel?”

As mentioned earlier in the book, though Yakov’s statement is inaccurate, the gist of his question is reasonable and deserves a good answer. The following table was worked up in an effort to help him make sense of the Servant references in Isaiah chapters 42, 49 and 50. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is not included in the following consideration because the passage has already been commented on extensively in other sections. (The most relevant verses in the following consideration are highlighted.)

THE UNNAMED SERVANT	ISRAEL	OBSERVATIONS
Isaiah 42:1-7	Isaiah 42:17-25	Isaiah 42:1-25
<p>42:1 “Behold My servant, I will support him, My chosen one, whom My soul desires; I have placed My spirit upon him, he shall promulgate justice to the nations.”</p> <p>42:2 “He shall neither cry nor shall he raise [his voice]; and he shall not make his voice heard outside.”</p> <p>42:3 “A breaking reed he shall not break; and a flickering flaxen</p>	<p>42:12 “They shall give glory to the Lord, and they shall recite His praise on the islands.”</p> <p>42:13 “The Lord shall go out like a hero; like a warrior shall He arouse zeal; He shall shout, He shall even cry, He shall overpower His foes.”</p> <p>42:14 “I was silent from time immemorial; I am still, I restrain Myself. Like a travailing woman will I cry; I will be terrified and destroy them together.”</p>	<p>The Unnamed Servant: 42:1-7</p> <p>The contrast between the unnamed Servant and Israel in these verses could not be greater.</p> <p>42:1 He promulgates justice.</p> <p>42:2 Is modest.</p> <p>42:3 Kind to the oppressed.</p> <p>42:4 Nothing can keep him from accomplishing his mission.</p> <p>42:6 Called in righteousness...</p>

<p>wick he shall not quench; with truth shall he execute justice."</p> <p>42:4 "Neither shall he weaken nor shall he be broken, until he establishes justice in the land, and for his instruction, islands shall long."</p> <p>42:5 "So said God the Lord, the Creator of the heavens and the One Who stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and what springs forth from it, who gave a soul to the people upon it and a spirit to those who walk thereon."</p> <p>42:6 "I am the Lord; I called you with righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations."</p> <p>42:7 "To open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of a dungeon, those who sit in darkness out of a prison."</p> <p>42:8 "I am the Lord, that is My Name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to the graven images."</p> <p>42:9 "The former things, behold they have come to pass, and the new things I</p>	<p>42:15 "I will destroy mountains and hills, and all their grass I will dry out, and I will make rivers into islands and I will dry up the pools."</p> <p>42:16 "And I will lead the blind on a road they did not know; in paths they did not know I will lead them; I will make darkness into light before them, and crooked paths into straight ones. These things, I will do them and I will not forsake them."</p> <p>42:17 "They shall turn back greatly ashamed, those who trust in the graven image, who say to the molten idols, 'You are our gods.'"</p> <p>42:18 "You deaf ones, listen, and you blind ones, look to see.</p> <p>42:19 Who is blind but My servant, and deaf as My messenger whom I will send? He who was blind as the one who received his payment, and he who was blind is as the servant of the Lord."</p> <p>42:20 "There is much to see but you do not observe, to open the ears but no one listens."</p> <p>42:21 "The Lord desires [this] for His righteousness' sake; He magnifies the Torah and strengthens it..."</p> <p>42:22 "And it is a robbed and pillaged people; all</p>	<p>"made a people's covenant." The Servant is the "covenant [and] light to the nations," not the nation of Israel.</p> <p>42:7 Commissioned by God to restore sight to blind Israel and lead them out of prison.</p> <p>NOTE: Jesus applied 42:1-4 to himself in Matthew 12:16-21. Simeon, an elderly Israelite also applied Isaiah 40:5 to Jesus.—Luke 2:25-32.</p> <p>The above shows that in the 1st Century the unnamed Servant was seen to be different from Jacob/Israel mentioned later in the passage.</p> <p>The Talmud and Targum apply this section to the Messiah and so does Radak (13th Century), Metzudot (18th Century), and the Malbim (19th Century). Rashi and LXX apply it to Israel.⁹⁵</p> <p>Israel: 42:17-25</p> <p>42:17 Trusts in images and is ashamed (compare Isaiah 50:7).</p> <p>42:19 Is blind and deaf.</p> <p>42:23 Doesn't pay attention to God.</p> <p>42:24 Is plundered for sinning against God.</p> <p>42:25 Punished by God</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>tell; before they sprout I will let you hear.”</p> <p>42:10 “Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise from the end of the earth, those who go down to the sea and those therein, the islands and their inhabitants.”</p> <p>42:11 “The desert and its cities shall raise [their voice]; Kedar shall be inhabited with villages; the rock dwellers shall exult, from the mountain peaks they shall shout.”</p>	<p>their youths are grieved, and they are hidden in dungeons; they are subject to plunderers, and none rescues [them], to pillagers, and no one says, ‘Return.’”</p> <p>42:23 “Who among you will hearken to this, will listen and hear for the future? 24 Who subjected Jacob to plunder and Israel to spoilers? Was it not the Lord? This, that we sinned against Him, and they did not want to go in His way and did not hearken to His Torah.”</p> <p>42:25 “And He poured out upon them the fury of His anger and the strength of battle, and it blazed upon them all around and they did not know, and it burned among them and they did not take heed.”</p>	
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

∞ ∞ ∞

THE UNNAMED SERVANT	ISRAEL	OBSERVATIONS
Isaiah 49:1-6, 8-9	Isaiah 49:10-26	Isaiah 49:1-26
<p>49:1 “Hearken, you islands, to me, and listen closely, you nations, from afar; the Lord called me from the womb, from the innards of my mother He mentioned my name.”</p> <p>49:2 “And He made my mouth like a sharp sword, He concealed me in the shadow of His hand; and He made me into a polished arrow, He hid me in His quiver.”</p>	<p>49:7 So said the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, about him who is despised of men, about him whom the nation abhors, about a slave of rulers, “Kings shall see and rise, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, for the sake of the Lord Who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, and He chose you.”</p> <p>49:10 They shall neither hunger nor thirst, nor shall the heat and the sun smite</p>	<p>The Unnamed Servant: 49:1-6, 8-9 49:1 The Servant is called from the womb of his mother.</p> <p>49:3 “My Servant Israel”: Many believe Isaiah is referred to here because verses 1 and 5 mention <i>the womb of his mother</i>, an expression never used in relation to the nation of Israel, and the following verses also indicate an</p>

<p>49:3 “And He said to me, ‘You are My servant, Israel, about whom I will boast.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See “NOTE” in right hand column explaining why many Jewish sources feel this verse does not refer to Israel. <p>49:4 “And I said, ‘I toiled in vain, I consumed my strength for nought and vanity.’ Yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my deed is with my God.”</p> <p>49:5 “And now, the Lord, Who formed me from the womb as a servant to Him, said to bring Jacob back to Him, and Israel shall be gathered to Him, and I will be honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God was my strength.”</p> <p>49:6 “And He said, ‘It is too light for you to be My servant, to establish the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the besieged of Israel, but I will make you a light of nations, so that My salvation shall be until the end of the earth.”</p> <p>49:8 “So said the Lord, ‘In a time of favor I answered you, and on a day of salvation I helped you; and I will watch you, and I will make you for a people of a covenant [JSB, “covenant of a people”] to establish a land, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.”</p>	<p>them, for He Who has mercy on them shall lead them, and by the springs of water He shall guide them.</p> <p>49:11 And I will make all My mountains into a road, and My highways shall be raised.</p> <p>49:12 Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Sinim.</p> <p>49:13 Sing, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, and mountains burst out in song, for the Lord has consoled His people, and He shall have mercy on His poor.</p> <p>49:14 “And Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.’”</p> <p>49:15 “Shall a woman forget her sucking child, from having mercy on the child of her womb? These too shall forget, but I will not forget you.”</p> <p>49:16 “Behold on [My] hands have I engraved you; your walls are before Me always.”</p> <p>49:17 “Your sons have hastened; those who destroy you and those who lay you waste shall go forth from you.”</p> <p>49:18 “Lift your eyes around and see, all of them have gathered, have come to you; as I live, says the Lord, that you shall wear all of them as jewelry, and you shall tie them as a bride.”</p>	<p>individual (see NOTE below).</p> <p>49:5 The Servant is tasked with bringing “Jacob back.”</p> <p>49:6 He is a “light to the nations.” But Israel was blind and in darkness; compare: 42:7, 16; 49:9; 50:10.</p> <p>49:8 He is “for a people of a covenant,” or, “for a peoples’ covenant (as in 42:6).</p> <p>49:9 Assigned to tell the prisoners to “Go out!”</p> <p>NOTE: Most Rabbinic commentators and some modern scholars say the verse refers to Isaiah and not the nation of Israel, but it is a matter of debate. JSB comments on 49:1-6 (page 864): “The servant speaks to the nations of the world as well as the Israelites.”</p> <p>Israel: 49:7, 9 and 10-26 The following verses refer to Israel’s restoration from Babylonian captivity (see Addendums 7-9).</p> <p>49:10 Israel would be led out of captivity.</p> <p>49:12 Israel would be regathered from all directions, a result of the labors of the Servant (compare 49:5).</p> <p>49:14 “The Lord has forsaken/forgotten me...” are Israel’s thoughts and not those of the Servant.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

49:9 “To say to the prisoners, ‘Go out!’ and *to the darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’ By the roads they shall graze, and by all rivers is their pasture.”

**Artscroll:* “...to those in the darkness...”

JSB: “...to those who are in darkness...”

49:19 “For your ruins and your desolate places and your land that has been destroyed, for now you shall be crowded by the inhabitants, and those who would destroy you shall be far away.”

49:20 “Your children of whom you were bereaved shall yet say in your ears, ‘The place is too narrow for me; move over for me so that I will dwell.’”

49:21 “And you shall say to yourself, ‘Who begot these for me, seeing that **I am bereaved and solitary, exiled and rejected**, and who raised these? Behold I was left alone; these—[from] where are they?’”

49:22 “So said the Lord God, ‘Behold I will raise My hand to the nations, and to the peoples will I raise My standard, and they shall bring your sons in their armpits, and your daughters shall be borne on their shoulder[s].’”

49:23 ‘And kings shall be your nursing fathers and their princesses your wet nurses; they shall prostrate themselves to you with their face on the ground, and they shall lick the dust of your feet, and you shall know that I am the Lord, for those who wait for Me shall not be ashamed.’”

49:24 “Shall prey be taken from a mighty warrior, or shall the captives of the righteous escape?”

49:17-26 God promises the restoration of Israel, the repopulation of the land and retribution for the nation’s persecutors.

	<p>49:25 “For so said the Lord, ‘Even the captives of a mighty warrior can be taken and the prey of a tyrant shall escape, and with your contender will I contend, and your sons I will save.’”</p> <p>49:26 “And those who taunt you-I will feed their flesh, and as with sweet wine they shall become drunk [from] their blood; and all flesh shall know that I am the Lord Who saves you, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”</p>	
--	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

∞ ∞ ∞

THE UNNAMED SERVANT	ISRAEL	OBSERVATIONS
Isaiah 50:4-10	Isaiah 50:1-3, 11	Isaiah 50:1-11
<p>50:4 “The Lord God gave me a tongue for teaching, to know to establish times for the faint [for His] word; He awakens me every morning, He awakens My ear, to hear according to the teachings.”</p> <p>50:5 “The Lord God opened my ear, and I did not rebel; I did not turn away backwards.”</p> <p>50:6 “I gave my back to smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I did not hide my face from embarrassments and spitting.”</p> <p>50:7 “But the Lord God helps me, therefore, I was not embarrassed; therefore, I made my face</p>	<p>50:1 “So said the Lord, ‘Where is your mother’s bill of divorce that I sent her away? Or, who is it of My creditors to whom I sold you? Behold for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.’”</p> <p>50:2 “Why have I come and there is no man? [Why] have I called and no one answers? Is My hand too short to redeem, or do I have no strength to save? Behold, with My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make rivers into a desert; their fish become foul because there is no water and die because of thirst.”</p> <p>50:3 “I clothe the heavens with darkness, and I make sackcloth their raiment.”</p>	<p>The Unnamed Servant: 50:4-10 The Servant speaks of how God has prepared him for his mission, the suffering he endures in carrying it out and his personal integrity.</p> <p>50:4 He listens and teaches others in wisdom.</p> <p>50:5 He pays attention to God’s commands and is ready to obey them.</p> <p>50:6 He suffers abuse and persecution because of doing God’s will.</p> <p>50:7 God was with him because his conduct was irreproachable, and he had nothing to be ashamed about.</p> <p>50:8, 9 He had no fear that anyone could bring a justified charge of unrighteousness against him.</p>

<p>like flint, and I knew that I would not be ashamed.”</p> <p>50:8 “He Who vindicates me is near, whoever wishes to quarrel with me-let us stand together; whoever is my contender shall approach me.”</p> <p>50:9 “Behold, the Lord God shall help me; who is he that will condemn me? Behold all of them shall wear out like a garment, a moth shall consume them.”</p> <p>50:10 “Who among you is God-fearing, who hearkens to the voice of His servant, who went in darkness and who has no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord and lean on his God.”</p>	<p>50:11 “Behold all of you who kindle fire, who give power to flames; go in the flame of your fire, and in the flames you have kindled; from My hand has this come to you, in grief you shall lie down.”</p>	<p>50:10 The Servant encourages Israel, who is in darkness, to listen to “His Servant,” referring to himself (compare 42:7; 49:9).</p> <p>Israel: 50:1-3, 11 Israel is assured God would redeem them.</p> <p>50:1 Israel, viewed as a wife and Israelites as children. God is informing them that he had not given them up even though they had been sold (to Babylon) because of their transgressions.</p> <p>50:11 Israelites who despise the word of the Servant (in contrast to those mentioned in verse 10) will be punished by God.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

∞ ∞ ∞

6. ISAIAH 52:1-12: A RESTORATION PROPHECY LIKE OTHERS – WHY IT MATTERS

At first blush, examining Isaiah 52:1-12 might seem like just a boring academic endeavor with little benefit. And perhaps it would be if it weren’t such a fundamental issue to Yakov and so hotly debated by the Orthodox community. The contention surrounding the passage makes it interesting and necessary.

Yakov: You said, Isaiah 53... is connected with the Babylon exile. I shared inputs that this cannot be and you refuse to respond.

Me: I never refused to answer your questions regarding the Babylonian exile... Babylonian captivity is a major issue in understanding how to apply Isaiah 53 and I have it marked for special consideration...

According to the Orthodox interpretation, and of course, to Yakov, Isaiah 52:1-12 is a Messianic Age prophecy and what follows in chapter 52/53, is about Israel. That makes the context of this passage pivotal to the interpretation that the Servant in Isaiah 52/53 is the nation of Israel.

A close examination of Isaiah 52:1-12 reveals that it is a prophecy about Israel’s return to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon, and the Servant passage that follows in 52:13

begins a new section that is not connected to the previous context. (This has been dealt with extensively in the verse by verse examination of Isaiah 52/53 in Chapter 1, and in the analysis of Roth's article in Addendum 3.)

Here then, in answer to Yakov, is the information on Isaiah 52:1-12 and why the passage refers to Israel's return from Babylonian exile in 537 BCE, and not to the Messianic Age.

∞ ∞ ∞

God allowed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and 70 years of Babylonian exile because Israel had sinned against him for so long. The restoration theme in Isaiah 52:1-12 is not unique since the book of Isaiah and others are replete with such prophecies predicting what would take place some 200 years later. These prophecies specify that Israel's captivity would occur according to God's express will and not because the gods of Babylon were superior to Jehovah. (Compare Isaiah 46:1, Jeremiah 50:2, and especially Jeremiah 51:44, where Babylonian gods are mentioned by name.)

The following commentary from *The Jewish Study Bible* discusses the restoration context of Isaiah 52:1-12.—2nd Edition, pages 871, 872.

ISAIAH 52:1-6: "God speaks again to Zion, telling her that her nightmare is over; the opening language is similar to Isaiah 51:17. **2:** *Shake off the dust:* As a captive, the city sat in dirt, humiliated.... **5:** *Therefore*, rather, "But now." *The current exile in Babylonia is contrasted with the people's earlier exiles in Egypt and in Assyria. My name is reviled:* God's own reputation is harmed by the Babylonian exile since people may think that this represents the triumph of the Babylonian gods over the God of Israel, and for this reason God is sure to liberate the nation...."

52:7-12: "A concluding prophecy of restoration. God's response to the nation's prayer ended in verse 6, and now the prophet sums up the message: Redemption is at hand. **7-10:** God's own Presence will return to Jerusalem; the prophet imagines that the lookouts in Jerusalem's higher buildings or fortifications will see God's Presence as it comes toward the city. Cf. 40:3-5 note... **12:** *The earlier exodus from Egypt is contrasted with the imminent exodus from Babylonia.* The former took place in haste and confusion (see Exodus 12:11; Deuteronomy. 16.3), but the new exodus will be more stately."

The *JSB* mentions various restoration prophecies in Isaiah that share similar expressions with Isaiah 52:1-12. The following table further highlights the shared expressions in the restoration prophecies in Isaiah chapters 40-52, and other Bible books, confirming that Isaiah 52:1-12 is a restoration prophecy like the others regarding the end of Jewish exile in Babylon rather than a Messianic Age prophecy.

∞ ∞ ∞

7. ISAIAH CHAPTER 52:1-12 COMPARED WITH OTHER RESTORATION PROPHECIES

52:1 " Awake! Awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem , the holy city!"	Isaiah 51:17 " Awake! Awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem , you who have drunk from the hand of Jehovah his cup of wrath."
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>NOTE: The <i>JSB</i> comment above also mentions this verse as a restoration prophecy.</p>
<p>52:2 “Shake off the dust, rise and take a seat, O Jerusalem. Loosen the bonds on your neck, O captive daughter of Zion...”</p>	<p>Ezra 1:1-3 “In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that Jehovah’s word spoken by Jeremiah would be fulfilled, Jehovah stirred the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his kingdom, which he also put in writing, saying: 2 ‘This is what King Cyrus of Persia says, Jehovah the God of the heavens has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—he is the true God—whose house was in Jerusalem.”</p>
<p>52:3 “For this is what Jehovah says: ‘You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be repurchased...’”</p>	<p>Isaiah 48:20 “Go out from Babylon!... Say: “Jehovah has repurchased his servant Jacob.”</p>
<p>52:4, 5 “For this is what the Sovereign Lord Jehovah says: ‘At first my people went down to Egypt to live there as foreigners; Then Assyria oppressed them without cause. 5 What, then, should I do here?’ declares Jehovah. ‘For my people were taken for nothing.’”</p>	<p>Jeremiah 50:17, 18 “The people of Israel are scattered sheep. Lions have dispersed them. First the king of Assyria devoured them; then King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon gnawed on their bones. 18 Therefore this is what Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Here I will deal with the king of Babylon and with his land in the same way that I dealt with the king of Assyria.’”</p> <p>NOTE: The <i>JSB</i> comment above also makes the connection with 52:5 and Babylonian captivity.</p> <p>2 Chronicles 36:17 “So he brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary; he felt no compassion for young man or virgin, old or infirm. God gave everything into his hand.”</p>

<p>“Those ruling over them keep howling in triumph,’ declares Jehovah, ‘And constantly, all day long, my name is treated with disrespect.’”</p>	<p>Ezekiel 36:20 “But when they came to those nations, people profaned my holy name by saying about them, ‘These are the people of Jehovah, but they had to leave his land.’”</p> <p>Daniel 5:2-4 “While under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar gave an order to bring in the vessels of gold and silver that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his concubines and his secondary wives could drink from them. 3 Then they brought in the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God in Jerusalem, and... 4 They drank wine, and they praised the gods of gold and silver, of copper, iron, wood, and stone.”</p>
<p>52:6 “For that reason my people will know my name... they will know in that day that I am the One speaking. Look, it is I!”</p>	<p>Isaiah 45:1, 3 “I will give you...the hidden treasures in the concealed places, so that you may know that I am Jehovah, the God of Israel, who is calling you by your name.”</p> <p>Isaiah 49:8, 9, 23 “Jehovah says: ‘In a time of favor I answered you, and in a day of salvation I helped you...and you will have to know that I am Jehovah.’”</p> <p>Ezra 1:4 “Anyone who is residing as a foreigner, wherever he may be, let him be helped by his neighbors by their giving him silver and gold, goods and livestock, along with the voluntary offering for the house of the true God, which was in Jerusalem.”</p>
<p>52:7 “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news... the one proclaiming salvation, the one saying to Zion: Your God has become King!”</p>	<p>Isaiah 40:9 “Go up onto a high mountain, you woman bringing good news for Zion. Raise your voice with power, You woman bringing good news for Jerusalem. Raise it, do not be afraid. Announce to the cities of Judah: ‘Here is your God.’”</p>
<p>52:8 “Listen! Your watchmen raise their voice... for they will see it clearly when Jehovah gathers back Zion.”</p>	<p>Daniel 9:2 “...in the first year of his [Ahasuerus] reign I, Daniel, discerned by the books the number of years mentioned in the word of Jehovah to Jeremiah the prophet to fulfill the</p>

	desolation of Jerusalem, namely, 70 years.”
52:9 “Become cheerful, shout joyfully in unison, you ruins of Jerusalem, for Jehovah has comforted his people; he has repurchased Jerusalem...”	Isaiah 49:13 “Shout for joy, you heavens, and rejoice, you earth. Let the mountains become cheerful with a joyful cry. For Jehovah has comforted his people, and he shows mercy to his own afflicted ones.”
52:10 “Jehovah has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the acts of salvation of our God.”	Isaiah 55:11-13 “So my word...will have sure success in what I send it to do. 12 For you will go out with rejoicing, and in peace you will be brought back. The mountains and the hills will become cheerful before you with a joyful cry, and the trees of the field will all clap their hands... And it will bring fame to Jehovah, an everlasting sign that will never perish.”
52:11 “Turn away, turn away, get out of there, touch nothing unclean! Get out from the midst of her, keep yourselves clean, you who are carrying the utensils of Jehovah.”	<p>Isaiah 48:20 “Go out from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Announce it with a joyful cry! Proclaim it! Make it known to the ends of the earth.”</p> <p>Ezra 1:7, 9 “King Cyrus also brought out the utensils of the house of Jehovah that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his god... 9 Now this was the inventory...”</p> <p>Jeremiah 50:8 “Flee out of the midst of Babylon, go out of the land of the Chaldeans.”</p> <p>Jeremiah 51:6 “Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and escape for your life.”</p> <p>Zechariah 2:6, 7 “Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north,” declares Jehovah. ‘For I have scattered you to the four winds of the heavens,’ declares Jehovah.”</p>
52:12 “For you will not depart in panic, nor will you have to flee, for Jehovah will go ahead of you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”	Ezra 8:21-23 “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, to humble ourselves before our God, to seek guidance from him for our journey, for us and for our children and for all our goods. 22 I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemies along the way, because we had said to the

	king: 'The good hand of our God is over all those seeking him, but his strength and his anger are against all those abandoning him.' 23 So we fasted and made request of our God concerning this, and he listened to our entreaty."
--	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Summary: The *JSB* commentary together with the textual comparisons in the above table leave no doubt that Isaiah 52:1-12 is a prophecy about Israel's restoration from Babylonian captivity which took place in 537 BCE. Therefore, Isaiah 52:1-12 lacks relevancy in the discussion about the identity of the Servant in the passage beginning in 52:13. However, even putting aside Isaiah 52:1-12, Jewish Orthodoxy would still maintain that the Servant passage beginning in 52:13 is about Israel. The verse-by-verse discussion of Isaiah 52/53 in Chapter 1 shows that the idea does not hold up under scrutiny.

The *JSB* comment on 52:5 is particularly incisive: "*My name is reviled*": God's own reputation is harmed by the Babylonian exile since people may think that this represents the triumph of the Babylonian gods over the God of Israel, and for this reason God is sure to liberate the nation."

- **Isaiah 52:5** "Those ruling over them keep howling in triumph,' declares Jehovah, 'And constantly, all day long, my name is treated with disrespect.'"
- **Ezekiel 36:20** "But when they came to those nations, people profaned my holy name by saying about them, 'These are the people of Jehovah, but they had to leave his land.'"
- **Daniel 5:2-4** "Belshazzar gave an order to bring in the vessels of gold and silver that his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem [and]... 4 They drank wine, and they praised the gods of gold and silver, of copper, iron, wood, and stone."

God was committed to effect the liberation of Israel from Babylon because his name was involved. When he did, it shocked the nations and many Jews as well.

Just imagine what a conversation between a Babylonian guard and a Jew in captivity might have looked like if Isaiah 52:1-12, and all the other restoration prophecies, were understood to be about some far-off Messianic Age:

IMAGINARY CONVERSATION

- **Babylonian:** "Our gods took Israel out of the hand of your god and now you're our captives!" Our gods are stronger than Jehovah.
- **Israelite:** "That's not so! Our prophets say that Jehovah allowed your gods to defeat us because we sinned against him, and he will release us in the Messianic Age."
- **Babylonian:** "Messianic Age? And when is this Messianic Age?"
- **Israelite:** "Not sure. Sometime in the future, when we repent."
- **Babylonian:** "Yeah, yeah... when you repent. Nice try! I'll believe that one when I see it. Now get back to work." (Grinning as he walks away.)
- **Israelite:** (To himself)... "Hmm, that one's a hard sell, not sure I believe it myself."

But that imaginary conversation would never have happened because the prophecies, issued nearly two centuries earlier, spoke of liberation from *Babylon* by God's hand.

Take Isaiah 43 for example:

- **Isaiah 43:10-14** 10 “You are my witnesses,’ declares Jehovah, ‘Yes, my *servant* whom I have chosen... 14 For your sakes I will send to Babylon and bring down all the bars of the gates and the Chaldeans... will cry out in distress.”
- **JBS note on Isaiah 43:9-15**: “The fulfillment of prophecies concerning Babylonia... Long ago the Lord foretold the downfall of the Mesopotamian empire that defeated Judah; see [Isaiah] 10.5–27; 13.1–14.27; 21.1–10; Jer. 29.10; 30.11. Now that Babylonia has indeed fallen (or perhaps is about to fall), it is clear that the God of Israel alone rules. 14: I send Cyrus to Babylon to conquer it [44:28-45:1].
 - “Chaldeans: The Chaldeans were a leading tribe in Babylonia... and the last kings of Babylonia stemmed from this group. As a result the term ‘Chaldean’ became a synonym for Babylonian.”

In other words, the Israelites were to be God’s “witnesses” to the fact that *their* God had effected their liberation from Babylon, as prophesied, and they would be his “servant” to tell others about the truthfulness of those restoration prophecies. They would tell how Jehovah had *allowed* Babylon to conquer them because of their unfaithfulness and how he liberated them at his pleasure after 70 years of exile. This would show, as *JSB* says, “that the God of Israel alone rules.” The fulfillment of the restoration prophecies forced all the nations round about to acknowledge this fact.

If the restoration prophecies, including Isaiah 52:1-12, had been referring to some far distant Messianic Age, they would have been of little solace to the Jews and, more importantly, done nothing to end the reproach brought upon God’s name due to the destruction and subjugation of Israel.

Yakov was unmoved by such reasoning. The *JSB* is too secular for him, and he summarily dismissed its comments without examination. And as far as he was concerned, none of the restoration prophecies have anything to do with Isaiah 52:1-12.

∞ ∞ ∞

8. A COMPARISON OF RESTORATION PROPHECIES IN ISAIAH CHAPTERS 40-51

We worked up the following table with the hope that seeing similar terminology in the restoration prophecies might help Yakov understand how they are all related. Since the texts speak for themselves, commentary is unnecessary.

Isaiah 40:1, 2, 4, 9 “... comfort my people, ’ says your God. ‘Let every valley be raised up, and every mountain and hill be made low. The rough ground must become level, and the rugged ground a valley plain... Speak to the heart of Jerusalem...that her compulsory service has been fulfilled, that her guilt has been paid off....Raise your voice with power, you woman bringing good news for Jerusalem. Raise it, do not be afraid.	Isaiah 48:20 “ Go out from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Announce it with a joyful cry! Proclaim it! Make it known to the ends of the earth. Say: ‘ Jehovah has repurchased his servant Jacob. ’” 49:13 “ Shout for joy, you heavens, and rejoice, you earth. Let the mountains become cheerful with a joyful cry. For Jehovah has comforted his people, And he shows mercy to his own afflicted ones.”
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Announce to the cities of Judah: ‘Here is your God.’”</p>	
<p>Isaiah 41:2, 25 “Who has raised up someone from the sunrise, calling him in righteousness to His feet, to hand over nations to him and to make him subdue kings? Who reduces them to dust before his sword, like windblown stubble before his bow?... I have raised up someone from the north, and he will come, one from the rising of the sun who will call on my name. He will trample rulers as if they were clay, like a potter who treads moist clay.”</p>	<p>Isaiah 45:1 “This is what Jehovah says to his anointed one, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of to subdue nations before him, to disarm kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut...”</p> <p>44:28 Cyrus... The One saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”</p> <p>46:11 “I am calling a bird of prey from the sunrise, from a distant land the man to carry out my decision. I have spoken, and I will bring it about. I have purposed it, and I will also carry it out.”</p> <p>Ezra 5:13 “King Cyrus of Babylon...issued an order to rebuild this house of God.”</p>
<p>Isaiah 42:16, 19 “I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know and cause them to tread on unfamiliar paths. I will turn the darkness before them into light and turn the rugged terrain into level land. This is what I will do for them, and I will not abandon them... Who is blind except my servant, so deaf as the messenger I send?”</p>	<p>Isaiah 40:1, 2, 4, 9 “...comfort my people,’ says your God. Let every valley be raised up, and every mountain and hill be made low. The rough ground must become level, and the rugged ground a valley plain... Speak to the heart of Jerusalem... that her compulsory service has been fulfilled...”</p> <p>Isaiah 43:8, 10, 14 “Bring out a people who are blind, though they have eyes, and who are deaf, though they have ears... ‘You are my witnesses,’ declares Jehovah, yes, ‘my servant whom I have chosen... For your sakes I will send to Babylon and bring down all the bars of the gates...”</p>
<p>Isaiah 43:1, 14 “Now this is what Jehovah says, your Creator, O Jacob, the One who formed you, O Israel: ‘Do not be afraid, for I have repurchased you... For your sakes I will send to Babylon and bring down all the bars of the gates, and the Chaldeans, in their ships, will cry out in distress.’”</p>	<p>Isaiah 45:1 “This is what Jehovah says to his anointed one, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of to subdue nations before him, to disarm kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut.”</p>
<p>Isaiah 44:26-28 “The One making the word of his servant come true and completely fulfilling the predictions of his messengers; the One saying of Jerusalem, ‘She will be inhabited,’... The One saying of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he will</p>	<p>Ezra 1:1-4 “In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia...[made] a proclamation throughout his kingdom... 2 ‘This is what King Cyrus of Persia says, ‘Jehovah the God of the heavens...has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem... 3 Whoever there is among you of all his people...let him go up</p>

completely carry out all my will'; The One saying of Jerusalem , 'She will be rebuilt ,' and of the temple , 'Your foundation will be laid .'"	to Jerusalem...and rebuild the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—he is the true God."
Isaiah 45:1 "This is what Jehovah says to his anointed one, to Cyrus , whose right hand I have taken hold of to subdue nations before him, to disarm kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut..."	" Cyrus turned to Babylonia [and]...In October 539 BCE, the greatest city of the ancient world fell to the Persians (<i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i> , article: <i>Cyrus the Great—King of Persia</i>).
Isaiah 46:1, 12 " Bel bends down, Nebo stoops over . Their idols are loaded on animals, on beasts of burden, like baggage that burdens the weary animals... Listen to me, you who are stubborn of heart, you who are far away from righteousness..."	Artscroll footnote on 46:1 "[Isaiah Chapter 46] begins by speaking figuratively of Bel and Nebo, the Babylonian deities, which double over and collapse when their country is conquered, and are then ignominiously carted off by the victors."
Isaiah 47:1 "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon . Sit down on the ground where there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans, for never again will people call you delicate and pampered."	NOTE: In Isaiah 47:1, Babylon is depicted as a queen, dethroned and humiliated due to being defeated in one night by Cyrus in 539 BCE.
Isaiah 48:14 " Jehovah...will carry out his delight against Babylon, and his arm will come against the Chaldeans...Go out from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Announce it with a joyful cry! Proclaim it! Make it known to the ends of the earth. Say: 'Jehovah has repurchased his servant Jacob.'"	Jeremiah 50:8 " Flee out of the midst of Babylon, go out of the land of the Chaldeans." Jeremiah 51:6 " Flee out of the midst of Babylon , and escape for your life."
Isaiah 49:8, 9 , "This is what Jehovah says: 'In a time of favor I answered you, and in a day of salvation I helped you; I kept safeguarding you to give you as a covenant for the people, to rehabilitate the land, to cause them to possess their desolate inheritances, to say to the prisoners, ' Come out! ' and to those in the darkness , 'Show yourselves!' ... Shout for joy, you heavens, and rejoice, you earth. Let the mountains become cheerful with a joyful cry. For Jehovah has comforted his people, and he shows mercy to his own afflicted ones ."	Isaiah 42:6, 7 "I, Jehovah, have called you in righteousness; I have taken hold of your hand. I will safeguard you and give you as a covenant for the people and as a light of the nations, 7 For you to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoner out of the dungeon and those sitting in darkness out of the prison... " 48:14, 20 " Jehovah...will carry out his delight against Babylon, and his arm will come against the Chaldeans... Go out from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Announce it with a joyful cry! Proclaim it! Make it known to the ends of the earth. Say: ' Jehovah has repurchased his servant Jacob .'"

<p>50:10 “Who among you fears Jehovah and listens to the voice of his servant? Who has walked in deep darkness, without any brightness? Let him trust in the name of Jehovah and support himself on his God.”</p>	<p>49:9 “To say to the prisoners, ‘Come out!’ And to those in the darkness, ‘Show yourselves!’”</p>
<p>51:14, 16, 17 “The one bent over in chains will soon be set free... I will...say to Zion, ‘you are my people...’ 17 Awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of Jehovah his cup of wrath.”</p>	<p>52:2 “Shake off the dust, rise and take a seat, O Jerusalem. Loosen the bonds on your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”</p>

∞ ∞ ∞

9. THE MYTH OF THE TEN LOST TRIBES

One reason Yakov insists that Isaiah 52:1-12 is a Messianic Age prophecy is because 52:4 mentions Assyria, and the ten tribes were taken captive by Assyria when it destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The thought is that the ten tribes were lost but would be regathered to Israel in the Messianic Age.

Isaiah 52:4 “At first my people went down to Egypt to live there as foreigners; then *Assyria* oppressed them without cause.”

The idea that ten tribes were *lost* is a popular myth lacking biblical basis. Descendants of all the tribes of Israel were regathered when the Jews returned to Jerusalem in 537 BCE. Three reasons are given below to support this conclusion.

It was prophesied that descendants of both Judah and Israel (the ten tribes) would return from the “land of the north,” that is, from Assyria as well as Babylon, and other kingdoms.

- **Zephaniah 2:13** “And he will stretch out his hand toward **the north**, and he will destroy **Assyria**.”
- **Jeremiah 16:14-16** “‘Therefore, look! days are coming,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘when it will no more be said: ‘As Jehovah is alive who brought the sons of Israel up out of the land of Egypt!’ 15 but: ‘As Jehovah is alive who brought the sons of Israel up **out of the land of the north and out of all the lands to which he had dispersed them!**’ and **I shall certainly bring them back to their soil**, which I gave to their forefathers. 16 Here I am sending for many fishers,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘and they will certainly fish for them; and afterward I shall send for many hunters, and they will certainly hunt them from every mountain.’”
 - The *JSB* says Jeremiah 16:14, 15 is a “Consolation prophecy to the exiles,” and is parallel to Jeremiah 23:7, 8: “... the analogy to a future, second exodus from the north is a central component of consolation in Babylonian-exilic prophecy (see Isa. 48.20– 21; 52.11– 12; Ezek. 20.32– 38).” In other words, these are not Messianic Age prophecies.
- **Jeremiah 23:7, 8** “‘However, the days are coming,’ declares Jehovah, ‘when they will no longer say, ‘As surely as Jehovah is alive, who brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt!’ 8 but rather, ‘As surely as **Jehovah** is alive, who brought out and **brought back the descendants of the house of Israel from**

the land of the *north* and from all the lands to which I had dispersed them,' and they will dwell in their own land."

In the postexilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the expression "*all Israel*" is repeatedly applied to the Israelites who returned from Babylonian exile. Obviously, descendants of all twelve tribes were among the returnees.

- **Jeremiah 50:3, 4** "Declare it among the nations... Say, '**Babylon has been captured**... Both man and beast have taken flight... 4 '**In those days** and at that time,' declares Jehovah, '**the people of Israel and the people of Judah will come together**. They will weep as they walk, and together they will seek Jehovah their God.'"
- **Ezra 6:17** "And **they presented** for the inauguration of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as **a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel.**"

The Christian Scriptures also show that the ten tribes were present and well represented in the Jewish population in the 1st Century.

- The prophetess Anna, "of Asher's tribe," was in attendance at the temple.—Luke 2:36.
- On the day of Pentecost Peter said: "Therefore **let all the house of Israel know** for a certainty that God made this Jesus Lord and Christ."—Acts 2:36.
- And Paul wrote, "...**our 12 tribes are** hoping to see fulfilled by intensely rendering him sacred service night and day."—Acts 26:7.

The ten tribes were not *lost* and there is no basis to allege that the reference to Assyria in Isaiah 52:4 "proves" that the context of Isaiah 52:1-12 is a Messianic Age prophecy.

∞ ∞ ∞

10. REFERENCES TO EGYPT AND BABYLON LINK MOSES AND THE SERVANT

The *JSB* notes that the restoration prophecies in Isaiah link Israel's liberation from Babylon to their liberation from Egypt centuries earlier. (See their comment on Isaiah 52:5, 12 in Addendum 6.) By linking Egypt and Babylon, Isaiah also links God's "Servant" Moses, who led the Israelites out of bondage, to another Servant, a prophet *like* Moses, who would also lead God's people out of *bondage*.—Deuteronomy 18:15.

Moses foretold that God would send a prophet like him to lead Israel.

- **Deuteronomy 18:15** "Jehovah your God will raise up for you from among your brothers a prophet like me. You must listen to him."

Joshuah was not the foretold *prophet like Moses*.

- **Deuteronomy 34:10** "But there has never again arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom Jehovah knew face-to-face."

Malachi also announced the coming of someone who would be sent by God to lead the nation.

- **Malachi 4:5, 6** (3:23, 24 in Tanakh) "Look! I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awe-inspiring day of Jehovah. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers back toward sons, and the hearts of sons back toward fathers, so that I may not come and strike the earth, devoting it to destruction."

- **Hertz** (*Pentateuch*, Soncino ed, p 970), “*Lest I come and smite the land with utter destruction*: According to Jewish tradition, Elijah’s mission is to... herald the advent of the Messiah and turn mankind to their father in heaven.—Eduyoth 8:7.”

The timing of Moses’ leading the Israelites out of Egypt, 430 years after Abraham (Exodus 12:21), and Jesus’ appearance on the scene, about 450 years after Malachi’s prophecy, is noteworthy.

References to Egypt:

- From Isaiah 42-52, there are over 30 references to the Israelites’ salvation from Egyptian bondage including texts pertaining to that period of time.
- There are references to the period of Egyptian bondage in Isaiah chapters 42-46, 48, 50, 51, and 52.

Here is a partial list of texts that relate Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage to the nation’s deliverance from Babylonian bondage:

Isaiah 43:2 “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not flood over you.”

- **Exodus 14:29** “But the Israelites walked on dry ground in the midst of the seabed, and the waters formed a wall on their right hand and on their left.”

Isaiah 43:3 “I have given Egypt as a ransom for you.”

- **Psalms 78:53** “He led them in security, and they felt no fear; the sea covered their enemies.

Isaiah 43:16 This is what Jehovah says, the One making a way through the sea and a path even through turbulent waters.”

- **Exodus 14:16** “As for you, lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the Israelites may go through the midst of the sea on dry ground.”

Isaiah 43:17 “The One who draws out the war chariot and the horse, the army together with the mighty warriors... They will be extinguished, snuffed out like a burning wick.”

- **Exodus 15:4** “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea, and his finest warriors have sunk into the Red Sea.”

Isaiah 43:19, 20 “I will make a way through the wilderness and rivers through the desert. For I provide water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, for my people... to drink.”

- **Psalms 78:15, 52** “He split rocks in the wilderness, He let them drink their fill as if from deep waters... he brought his people out like a flock and guided them like a drove in the wilderness.”

Isaiah 45:7 “I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity.”

- **Exodus 10:21** “Jehovah then said to Moses: ‘Stretch out your hand toward the heavens so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness so thick that it can be felt.’”

Isaiah 48:8 “And you have been called a transgressor from birth.”

- **Deuteronomy 9:7** “From the day that you left the land of Egypt until your coming to this place, you have rebelled against Jehovah.”
- **Psalms 95:10** “For 40 years I felt a loathing toward that generation, and I said: ‘They are a people who always go astray in their hearts; They have not come to know my ways.’”

Isaiah 48:21 “They did not become thirsty when he led them through devastated places. He caused water to flow out of the rock for them; He split a rock and made water gush out.”

- **Deuteronomy 8:14, 15** “Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who caused you to walk through the great and fearsome wilderness... with parched ground that has no water. He made water flow out of the flinty rock.” Also, Exodus 17:5, 6 and Numbers 20:11.

Isaiah 50:2 “Look! With my rebuke I dry up the sea; I make rivers a desert.”

- **Exodus 14:21, 22** “Moses now stretched out his hand over the sea; and Jehovah drove the sea back with a strong east wind all night long, turning the sea basin into dry ground, and the waters divided. 22 So the Israelites went through the midst of the sea on dry ground, while the waters formed a wall on their right hand and on their left.”—Compare: Psalm 106:9; Exodus 14:29.

Isaiah 50:3 “I clothe the heavens with gloom, and I make sackcloth their covering.”

- **Exodus 10:21** “Jehovah then said to Moses: ‘Stretch out your hand toward the heavens so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness so thick that it can be felt.’”

Isaiah 51:9 “Was it not you who broke Rahab [Egypt] to pieces, who pierced the sea monster?”

- **Compare** Psalm 87:4; Isaiah 30:7; 51:9, 10.

Isaiah 51:10 “Are you not the one who dried up the sea, the waters of the vast deep? The one who made the depths of the sea a roadway for the repurchased ones to cross?”

- **See Exodus 14:21, 22** above.

Isaiah 52:12 “For you will not depart in panic, nor will you have to flee, for Jehovah will go ahead of you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

- **Exodus 13:18, 21** “But it was in battle formation that the sons of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt. 21 Now Jehovah was going ahead of them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day and by night.”

∞ ∞ ∞

¹ The *JSB* comments (page 864), “Most Rabbinic commentators and some modern scholars argue that Deutero-Isaiah speaks here in the first person and that these verses describe the prophet’s own mission.” That is, the Servant is viewed as an individual, be that Isaiah or someone else.

² *The Hebrew Bible*, p. 1963, Kindle.

³ *The Story of Civilization*, Part 3, page 542

⁴ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/gallup-israel-one-of-least-religious-countries-398823>

⁵ “While most Haredi Jews oppose Zionism in some way, groups like Neturei Karta and the Satmar Hasidim do not recognize the modern State of Israel... [They perceive] Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel as an anti-messianic act... In the words of the Midrash (as expounded by Rashi), the people were adjured not to return collectively to the Land of Israel by the exertion of physical force, nor to ‘rebel against the nations of the world,’ nor to ‘hasten the End.’ In short, they were required to wait for the heavenly, complete, miraculous, supernatural, and meta-historical redemption that is totally distinct from the realm of human endeavor.”

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ultra-orthodox-anti-zionist/>

⁶ <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/survey-shows-israelis-to-be-among-worlds-most-liberal-s61oip7s>

⁷ <https://www.wjtv.com/business/press-releases/ein-presswire/660674663/divorce-rate-in-israel-as-high-as-47-3/>

⁸ <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=4aad637e-c65b-4b2a-9cb7-d1a3f3c883aa#:~:text=Israel%20is%20a%20highly%20litigious,to%20option%20for%20solving%20disputes.&text=The%20Israeli%20judiciary%20comprises%20a,the%20Standard%20Form%20Contracts%20Tribunal>

⁹ <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53/>

¹⁰ <https://wolfmueeller.co/456-old-testament-passages-considered-messianic-by-the-rabbis/>

¹¹ Expectations of a military messiah led to the rise of numerous claimants who were accepted by rabbis and many Jews with catastrophic results. See *Jesus Did Not Fulfill Jewish Messianic Expectations*, Chapter 3, for a list of messianic pretenders.

¹² The following texts form a chain of messianic prophecies: Genesis 3:15; 22:18; 24:7; 28:14; 49:10; 1Chron 17:11; Isaiah 52/53 and Daniel 9:24-26; Malachi 2:15.

¹³ The Talmud related Isaiah 6:13; 7:21; 8:14 to the Messiah:

- **Isaiah 6:13** is referred in the Talmud (Keth. 112 b) to Messianic times: “When I said this before Shmuel he said: The generation will undergo refinement after refinement, i.e., several stages of cleansing, as it is stated: ‘And if there be a tenth in it, it shall again be eaten up’ (Isaiah 6:13). Rav Yosef taught about the messianic era: Despoilers and despoilers of despoilers will plunder Eretz Yisrael at that time.”
- **Isaiah 7:21** referenced in Bereshit Rabah 48 (Genesis 18:7) to Messianic times.
- **Isaiah 8:14** is also Messianically applied in the Talmud (Sanh. 38a): “The son of David, i.e., the Messiah, will not come until two fathers’ houses are destroyed from Israel, as those two families are preventing the redemption. And they are the head of the exile who is in Babylonia, i.e., the family of the Exilarch, and the *Nasi* who is in Eretz Yisrael, i.e., the family of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (see 5a), as it is stated in reference to the Messiah: ‘And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel.’”—Isaiah 8:14.

¹⁴ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Insight-on-the-Scriptures/Persia-Persians/>

¹⁵ <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13377-seder-olam-rabbah>

¹⁶ All attempts to harmonize Seder Olam with conventional chronology, and there are many, run into insurmountable problems.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missing_years_\(Jewish_calendar\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missing_years_(Jewish_calendar))

¹⁷ “Among the premodern sources whose chronologies contradict Seder Olam Rabbah are Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, Josippon, Midrash Lekach Tov, a source quoted by Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Baal HaMaor, Radak, Rashba, Ritva, Ralbag, and Isaac Abarbanel.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seder_Olam_Rabbah

¹⁸ <https://aish.com/the-seventy-weeks-of-daniel-9/>

<https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/daniel-9-a-true-biblical-interpretation>

¹⁹ This 490-year period is viewed as a second exile, which included the first exile of 70 years of Babylonian captivity. (2 Chronicles 36:20, 21) The 70 years of Babylon was punishment for sabbatical violations, and the remaining 420 years for other sins. According to Orthodox interpretation, Jewish exile did not end in 70 CE because of the sins of the Jewish nation.

²⁰ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3915966/jewish/Timeline-of-Jewish-History

²¹ R. Rosenfeld: “[If the Jews had repented] the Messianic era could have ensued, and the Third Temple could have been built shortly after the Second.” R. Kravitz: “If they had returned whole-heartedly there would have been no need for the Second Temple to be destroyed and the events listed in verse 24 would have been fulfilled.”

²² The Jewish chronology presented here is based on Chabad’s *Timeline of Jewish History*, a revised version of Seder Olam which has slight differences.

²³ <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8604-jerusalem>

²⁴ “[Titus] had been informed that on that very day, which was the seventeenth day of Panemus (Tamuz), the sacrifice called ‘the Daily Sacrifice’ had failed, and had not been offered to God for want of men to offer it, and that the people were grievously troubled at it.”—Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6.2.1.

²⁵ Many calculate Artaxerxes’ 20th year as 455 BCE (Nehemiah 2:1-8). See *Insight on the Scriptures*, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Insight-on-the-Scriptures/Seventy-Weeks/>

²⁶ It should be noted that many Christian translations have “word” in Daniel 9:25.

²⁷ See also: Psalm 33:6, 9; 2 Chronicles 11:2, 4; Ezra 10:5, but many more examples exist.

²⁸ Nehemiah had recently received devastating news about the state of Jerusalem: Nehemiah 1:3, 4, “Those remaining... are in a terrible situation... The walls of Jerusalem are broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.’ 4 As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and began to weep and mourn for days, and I kept fasting and praying before the God of the heavens.”

²⁹ The Hebrew “דְּבָרִי”, “words of,” is the plural of דָּבָר in the construct state, called “smichut” in Hebrew grammar.

³⁰ The Jewish year is a luni-solar year of 354 days, cyclic adjustments are made to coincide with the solar year of 365 to ensure that the festivals always fall in the same season.

³¹ Rendering “*mashiach*,” as “anointed one” or “messiah,” is a matter of translator preference. Where valid options are involved, the translator is in charge. Jewish translators prefer “anointed one” over “messiah,” because they are not inclined toward the Christian interpretation of the prophecy. Even so, the translator’s decision is above criticism. Why shouldn’t a translator, Jewish or Christian, choose a *valid* option that favors their personal bias?

³² R. Kravitz’s list of eight mistranslations in Daniel 9:24-27. My comments are in italics.

1. “(קֹדֶשׁ קֹדֶשִׁים) means ‘holy of holies’ not the ‘most holy one.’” *The objection is justified.*
2. “(דְּבָר ~ Devar) that means ‘word’ not decree.” *The definition is correct but incomplete, a half-truth.*
3. “(מֹשִׁיחַ ~ Moshiach) means ‘anointed’ not ‘Messiah’ in 9:25.” *We are given a partial explanation, a half-truth, that is therefore misleading.*
4. “(מֹשִׁיחַ ~ Moshiach) means ‘anointed’ not ‘Messiah’ in 9:26.” *Same as above.*
5. “‘seven weeks and sixty-two’ means two events one at 7 weeks and the other 62 weeks later not one event after a cumulative 69 weeks.” *Irrelevant to the identification of Jesus as the Messiah.*
6. “(הַ ~ He) means ‘the.’” *The fact that Jewish translations have the definite article “the,” is withheld.*
7. “(לֹא יִהְיֶה עוֹד ~ V’ayn Lo) means ‘will be no more’ not ‘not for himself.’” *The objection is justified.*
8. “(כָּרַת ~ kares) means death to a transgressor that cuts off their relationship to God.” *Not always the case, a half-truth.*

Google-AI Overview: “In most contexts, using half-truths is seen as dishonest and unethical behavior.”

³³ Both rabbis follow Rashi in suggesting Agrippa II as a possibility for the “anointed one” who was *cut off* midweek. However, Agrippa II escaped from Jerusalem and died in the year 100 CE. <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7601-herod-agrippa-ii>

³⁴ See, Chapter 3, *References to Isaiah 52/53 Were Added to the Christian Scriptures Much Later*.

³⁵ Clement of Alexandria commented on the 490 years in Daniel 9 in 200 CE.

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02/anf02.vi.iv.i.xxi.html>

³⁶ Yakov mentions the Messianic Age. Judaism used to focus much more on the messiah. Today, in many Jewish circles, we hear more about the Messianic Age than the Messiah. It is a subtle change that is generally overlooked. I had an interesting chat-conversation on this with a Rabbi on Aish.com in July, '24. His final answer below was: "There are leaders [in Chabad] but Moshiach refers to a time, not a person". This does not represent Chabad belief.

ME: I have a question

Rabbi K: Sure! How can I help? 😊

ME: Many Jews believed messiah would appear before the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 expired. Is this true?

Rabbi K: Moshiach does not refer to a person.

ME: What then?

Rabbi K: a time period

ME: Why did R. Akiva support Bar Kochba as the messiah?

Rabbi K: yes, there are 2 schools of thought that will lead to the time of Moshiach.

ME: Not sure I understand. Were the Jews expecting the messiah as an individual in the 1st century? Chabadniks are expecting an individual, right?

Rabbi K: ah, no, there are leaders but moshiach refers to a time, not a person.

ME: Can you give me some links to articles I can read on that. Also, can you give me links to some info on the "2 schools of thought that will lead the time of Moshiach"?

Rabbi K: I'm getting. <https://mizrachi.org/hamizrachi/the-messianic-process-of-modern-israel/>

ME: Thanks. And the link that Jews in the first century were expecting an age and not an individual?

Rabbi K: (NO REPLY)

³⁷ Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant with the "house of Israel and... Judah," Jews under the Mosaic Covenant. Gentiles were later accepted into the New Covenant and became part of God's new "chosen" people. Acts 15:14, "God for the first time turned his attention to the nations to take out of them a people for his name."

³⁸ Unlike the Israelites who were born into the Jewish nation and automatically came under the Law Covenant, those in the New Covenant were chosen individually to become part of God's *new* nation. (Compare John 6:44, 65; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.) Though entire nations eventually converted to Christianity, that does not mean these individuals were chosen by God to be in the New Covenant and become part of the *people for God's name*. Jesus' own words and Christendom's history, bear this out. (Compare Matthew 7:15-23.)

³⁹ The "tent," refers to the portable *Temple* the Jews used in the wilderness, which served as a model for the basic plan of the Temple in Jerusalem.

⁴⁰ Within the holy of holies were the cherubs and the miraculous shekinah light, and classical Judaism held that it represented God's presence on earth; the spiritual junction of heaven and earth. It is, therefore, no leap to think of God's presence in heaven as the real "holy of holies."

⁴¹ Even if a third Temple were built, as some believe, it would have no relevance respecting the six objectives, being over 2000 years outside the "determined," fixed, timeframe in Daniel 9:24.

⁴² Regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus told his disciples, "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then... let those in the midst of her leave..." (Luke 21:20-24). In mid-November, 66 CE, Cestius Gallus advanced against Jerusalem in retaliation for the rebellion of the Jews some months earlier. After five days he succeeded in undermining the north wall, but with victory in reach, he ordered a retreat. The Christians, guided by Luke

21:20, 21, took this as a divine signal to leave the city. Four years later the Romans returned and destroyed Jerusalem. Josephus wrote that 1.1 million were killed and 97,000 were enslaved.

⁴³ Fumfer (Yiddish): “to mumble, stutter, or waffle.”

⁴⁴ Isaiah 48:18 “**If** only you would pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.”

⁴⁵ <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/gallup-israel-one-of-least-religious-countries-398823>

⁴⁶ Sanhedrin 98a mentions the possibility that the Jewish people could be redeemed even if they do not repent, based on the way the phrase “in its time,” in Isaiah 60:22, is interpreted.

⁴⁷ Extract from a letter sent to Jordan Peterson: Dear Dr. Peterson, in a recent video clip (at 8 minutes and 55 seconds), (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_uYygpjamE), you say: “It’s one of the elemental claims in the Old Testament that you are not even supposed to utter the name of God, because by defining it too tightly you lose its essence.” The comment is wrong on two counts. The ‘elemental claim not to utter the name of God’ is rabbinic, and in the Old Testament God requests that man mention his name; Yahweh/Jehovah (Exodus 3:15). Also, God Himself defined His name and it perfectly encapsulates His essence. The definition, found in Exodus 3:14, is surprisingly succinct considering the enormity of what’s being defined. A total of three words, “אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה” – Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh – which can be reduced to 1 word: “say to the sons of Israel, [Ehyeh – אֶהְיֶה] / *Will Become* hath sent me unto you.” The definition could not be tighter, nor word economy greater. And yet, it encapsulates perfectly that part of God’s essence He wanted men to grasp.

- God wanted people to see him as: He who causes *himself* to become the Fulfiller of his promises... “the one who makes things happen.” The name, in and of itself, is a promise, and any stated purpose or promise connected to the name is equal to a trustworthy prophecy.
- The power of the definition is seen in its impact on the Israelites. They accepted Moses to lead them out of Egyptian bondage(!)... an 80-year-old shepherd, fresh out of the desert, a would-be liberator who had failed four decades previous.

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachish_letters

⁴⁹ https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/coqdtk/people_of_reddit_who_call_Their_parents_by_their/?rdt=37353

⁵⁰ Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the first translation into any language, 280 BCE

⁵¹ The 1901 ASV Committee rejected the long-standing precedent of not translating God’s personal name: “the American Revisers... were brought to the unanimous conviction that a Jewish superstition, which regarded the Divine Name as too sacred to be uttered, ought no longer to dominate in the English or any other version of the Old Testament...” A reasonable decision: Why should the Septuagint, a translation that removed God’s name, be more authoritative than the Hebrew original?

⁵² <https://jewishjournal.com/judaism/torah/218961/respecting-name-god/>

⁵³ Page 447. *A History of Israel* was obligatory reading in my Bible History course at Haifa Technion University.

⁵⁴ Singer pronounced the name “Jehovah” in reference to Psalm 110:1 on YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4k_yZdjWiE @ 1:05:09. I doubt he would pronounce “Yehova,” for fear it might be correct.

⁵⁵ What Marcos says about making a joke of a replacement name is a reality. Israelis make a joke out of “Baruch Hashem,” (Bless the Name), to “Baruch ashem,” meaning, Baruch (a personal name) is guilty.

⁵⁶ Second Division, Volume 2, page 134, 135.

⁵⁷ *Israelis, Jews and Jesus* page 103.

⁵⁸ In his speech to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem for Shavuot/Pentecost, the Apostle Peter seems to deal directly with the issue of two messiahs, “let all the house of Israel know... that

God made him [Jesus] *both* Lord and Christ.” In other words, Peter is saying: Jesus is *both the* Lord (King), and *the* Messiah, so don’t expect anyone else to appear.

⁵⁹ Mesechet Derech Eretz Rabah Chapter 11; Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 97b

⁶⁰ Chabad’s website lists eight of the “greatest sages” (among “many others”) who calculated the date of messiah’s arrival.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2705100/jewish/Can-I-Calculate-the-Date-of-Moshiachs-Arrival.htm#footnote3a2705100

⁶¹ Saadia Gaon’s interpretation of Daniel 7:13 (9th Century CE), is interesting: “This (one like the Son of Man) is Messiah our righteousness; for is it not written with reference to Messiah, ‘lowly, and riding upon an ass’? (Zechariah 9:9); surely he comes in humility, for he does not come upon a horse in glory. But since it is written, ‘with the clouds of heaven,’ it signifies the angels of the heavenly hosts, which is the great glory which the Creator will give to the Messiah, as it is written, ‘with the clouds of heaven;’ then he shall be great in government. When it is said (Daniel 7:9), ‘the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool,’ he speaks after the manner of men. They brought him to the Ancient of days; for it is written (Psalm 110:1), ‘The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand,’ etc. ‘And there was given him dominion,’ i. e., He gave to him a government and a kingdom, as it is written (Psalm. 2:6), ‘Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion;’ and as it is written (1 Samuel 2:10), ‘He shall exalt the horn of his anointed; his kingdom shall not depart, and shall not be destroyed for ever and ever.’”

⁶² *Wars of the Jews* 2.258.

⁶³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chabad_messianism. See also, *The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference* by David Berger (Littman library, 2001). There is no way to substantiate the claim that Schneerson was a descendant of King David, much less that he was a descendant of King Solomon.

⁶⁴ It was around 200 CE that Biblical Judaism was replaced by *Rabbinic* Judaism with its emphasis on the Oral Law. The Sadducees, the majority of the priesthood in the 1st Century, rejected the Oral Law.

⁶⁵ *Israelis, Jews and Jesus* page 73, 74.

⁶⁶ *Jesus of Nazareth*, page 376.

⁶⁷ *The Story of Civilization, Vol III: Caesar and Christ*, page 557.

⁶⁸ *Jesus of Nazareth*, pages 113 and 374.

⁶⁹ Page 25, quoting J. Carmel in the literary magazine *Keshet*.

⁷⁰ *Jesus of Nazareth*, page 381.

⁷¹ *Jesus of Nazareth*, page 121, 122.

⁷² https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5168613/jewish/Why-Were-the-Temples-destroyed.htm#footnoteRef6a5168613

⁷³ The account in John 9:1-34 is another example illustrating the legalistic attitude of the Pharisees to the exclusion of compassion and other similar qualities.

⁷⁴ Psalm 22:1-18 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... 7 All those seeing me mock me; they sneer and shake their heads in derision: 8 ‘He entrusted himself to Jehovah. Let Him rescue him! Let Him save him, for he is so dear to Him!’... 16 For dogs surround me; they close in on me like a pack of evildoers, like a lion they are at my hands and feet. 17 I can count all my bones. They look on and stare at me. 18 They divide my garments among themselves, and they cast lots for my clothing.”

⁷⁵ https://lp.eteacherbiblical.com/lp_biblical_eli_insights_sin-en.html?blog=1

⁷⁶ The idea is like suggesting that God, the author of the laws of physics, would need to get advice from some brainiac physicists before reaching a conclusion on a matter involving the physical properties of the universe.

⁷⁷ King Manasseh is another example. He practiced idolatry, led all of Judah to do worse than the nations, made his sons “pass through the fire,” and shed innocent blood; all unpardonable sins under the law. (2 Kings 21:2-16). And yet, when he repented, God forgave him.—2 Chronicles 33:12, 13.

⁷⁸ “Answer for his error,” is a recurring term in Leviticus, used in reference to different types of sin. The punishment would naturally vary according to the sin: Expiation by offering a sacrifice, Leviticus 5:17; capital punishment, Leviticus 24:15, etc. In any case, a person who withheld testimony, as in Leviticus 5:1, would have done so knowingly.

⁷⁹ Megillah 9a/b mentions fourteen verses that rabbis intentionally mistranslated: Genesis 1:1,26, 27; 2:2; 11:7; 18:12; 49:6; Exodus 4:20; 12:40; 24:5, 11; Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; Leviticus 11:6. <https://www.sefaria.org/Megillah.9a.13?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>

⁸⁰ *Reflections on the Septuagint with Special Attention Paid to the Post-Pentateuchal Translations*. The article is dense, but worth the read:

<http://www.emanuel tov.info/docs/varia/215.reflections.septuagint.pdf?v=1.0>

⁸¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNwy4mPVfMg> (@ 7-8 minutes)

⁸² *Israelis, Jews and Jesus* pages 116, 118.

⁸³ *Israelis, Jews and Jesus* page 147.

⁸⁴ *Israelis, Jews and Jesus* page 136

⁸⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_and_philosophical_views_of_Albert_Einstein#cite_note-Einstein_and_Faith-31

⁸⁶ Isaiah 52:13; Psalm 110; and Daniel 7:13, all present a similar picture of the *exaltation* of an unnamed individual referred to as “my Servant,” “[David’s] Lord,” and “Son of Man,” respectively.

⁸⁷ The transfiguration is not a fulfillment of Isaiah 52:13, but an anticipatory vision to strengthen the disciples’ faith that Jesus had indeed fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Servant, the Messiah. Jesus’ death, and what the disciples would themselves suffer, would put their faith to the test.

⁸⁸ The power dynamic between Jews and Christians changed toward the end of the 4th Century CE, when Christianity became the official state religion. After that time, Jews were vastly outnumbered and Jewish-Christian relations varied greatly from one region to another. Relations became very tense in some places, which undoubtedly affected the tone of conversation and debate. Things took a decided downturn in the Middle Ages: “During this time, there were many organized disputes between Christians and Jews, sometimes linked to anti-Jewish pogroms, the burning of the Talmud, and the burning of Jews at the stake.” The “organized dispute,” which the rabbis were forced into, could greatly impact the Jewish community if they lost. But “winning” could mean persecution, exile, or even loss of life for the rabbi(s).

⁸⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_53

⁹⁰ **Targum Jonathan:** Isaiah 52:13-53:12 Behold my servant Messiah shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase, and be exceeding strong: 14. as the house of Israel looked to him during many days, because their countenance was darkened among the peoples, and their complexion beyond the sons of men, 15. so will he scatter many peoples; at him kings shall be silent, and put their hands upon their mouth, because that which was not told them have they seen, and that which they had not heard they have observed. 53:1. Who hath believed this our glad tidings? and the strength of the mighty arm of the Lord, upon whom as thus hath it been revealed? 2. The righteous will grow up before him, yeah, like blooming shoots, and like a tree which sends forth its roots to streams of water will they increase - a holy generation in the land that was in need of him; his countenance no profane countenance, and the terror at him not the terror at an ordinary man; his complexion shall be a holy complexion, and all who see him will look wistfully upon him. 3. Then he will become despised, and will cut off the glory of all the kingdoms; they will be prostrate and mourning, like a man of pains and like one destined for sicknesses; and as though the presence of the Shekhinah had been withdrawn from us, they will be despised, and esteemed not. 4. Then for our sins he will pray, and our iniquities will for his sake be forgiven, although we were accounted stricken, smitten from before the Lord, and afflicted. 5. But he will build up the Holy Place, which has been polluted for our sins, and delivered to the enemy for our iniquities; and by his instruction peace shall be increased upon

us, and by devotion to his words, our sins will be forgiven us. 6. All we like sheep had been scattered, we had each wandered off on his own way; but it was the Lord's good pleasure to forgive the sins of all of us for his sake. 7. He prayed, and he was answered, and ere even he had opened his mouth he was accepted; the mighty of the peoples he will deliver up like a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb dumb before her shearers; there shall be none before him opening his mouth or saying a word. 8. Out of chastisements and punishment he will bring our captives near; the wondrous things done to us in his days who shall be able to tell? For he will cause the dominion of the Gentiles to pass away from the land of Israel and transfer to them the sins which my people have committed. 9. He will deliver the wicked into Gehinnom, and those that are rich in possessions into the death of utter destruction, in order that those who commit sin may not be established, nor speak deceits with their mouth. 10. But it is the Lord's good pleasure to try and to purify the remnant of his people, so as to cleanse their souls from sin; these shall look on the Kingdom of their Messiah, their sons and their daughters shall be multiplied, they shall prolong their days, and those who perform the Law of the Lord shall prosper in his good pleasure.

⁹¹ <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53>

⁹² https://aish.com/isaiah_53_the_suffering_servant/

⁹³ <https://www.studylight.org/commentary/isaiah/54-1.html>

⁹⁴ Here is the conversation with Yakov where I suggest we go over the Roth article:

ME: Have you read the article by Marshall Roth on Isaiah 53? It's on AISH. I saw that a few anti-missionary authors quote him, so I read the article. Some of the phrases and arguments reminded me of things you've said so I thought we could review that article together.

YAKOV: Just skimmed through. My understanding seems to align with his view. Will read on Monday... He has listed a few key passages that support that Isaiah was talking about Israel. I have documented multiple passages that support that Isaiah 52-53 better fits Israel and does not fit Jesus. It will be good to study with you passage by passage.

⁹⁵ <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/rabbinic-commentators-rashi-isaiah-53>